

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC115
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Name of Service:	Countryside Montessori
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Address of Service:	Rossa, Doneraile, Co. Cork
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Eircode:	P51 YK25
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Name of Registered Provider:	Norma O'Brien
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	25/09/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	21
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 134 Bank Place, Mallow, Co Cork.
Inspection undertaken by:	F Collins
Title:	Early Years Inspector

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	N/A
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Description of service

Countryside Montessori is a privately owned Montessori service offering part time and sessional services to children aged between 2 and 6 years in a rural location near Doneraile in North Cork.

The school has been in operation since 2006. The service operates as a part time service between the hours of 8:30 to 1:30 and offers sessional services between 08.30-11.30 and between 11.45 and 14.45 daily.

The service is accommodated in a converted house where the premises is being used for the sole purpose of providing an early years service. The premises consists of two indoor classrooms and an outdoor classroom. There are children's and adult sanitary facilities and storage. The storage area also contains the kitchenette.

There are three outdoor areas which are used by the two groups daily and each group gets to use the different areas throughout the week. The outdoor areas consist of one tarmacadam and concrete area and two grass covered areas.

Both areas are secured from the road by suitable high fencing, with the locks to the gates inaccessible to the children.

Staffing

There were nine staff members named as working in the service of which six, inclusive of the registered provider were in the service on the day of inspection. The staff were qualified from level 5 to level 8 on the National Qualifications Framework.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,*
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,*
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and*
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Compliance Information

(2) Recruitment records in relation to each of the nine staff employed in the service were reviewed.

(a) Fourteen of the 18 required written and validated references on file were from past employers.

(b) Four of the 18 written and validated references were available and on file from sources other than previous employers.

(c) Records on file demonstrated that each of the nine adults that work in the service and have access to children had been Garda vetted.

(4) Each of the nine adults working in the service held appropriate qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 to Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (d) Police vetting was not available for the one adult that have lived in a state outside of Ireland and required same. Not having staff appropriately vetted may allow inappropriate adults have access to children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (d) Police vetting has been applied for and received by the staff member who requires same. Also, assurances have been received from the registered provider that all staff will be assessed for the requirement of overseas police vetting prior to commencing in the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

(2) (d) Police vetting has been received.

Summary Comment

The requirements for this Regulation have been met.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policy was reviewed and contained all of the appropriate guidance for staff and parents/guardians.

- The infection control policy inclusive of the nappy changing policy.

Non-Compliance Information

1. The healthy eating policy was reviewed and it did not set out clear guidance on the measures that sufficient, suitable and nutritious food and drink are available to the children attending the service on a sessional and part-time basis. The policy was not relevant to the type of care (part-time) being provided by the service. Not having a policy that sets out clear guidance on healthy food provision for the service type may allow for insufficient/inappropriate food being served to the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The healthy eating policy has been received and is appropriate for both sessional and part-time care provision in guiding staff and parents/guardians.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. A copy of the healthy eating policy has been received.

Summary Comment

The requirements for this Regulation have been met.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

- (1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.*
- (4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-*
- (a) a sessional pre-school service, and*
- (b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).*

Compliance Information

- (1) There were five staff working directly with the 30 children attending the service during the morning session with the registered provider arriving at the service at 11.15am.
- The children were cared for in two separate rooms. Two staff were working directly with the 17 children attending the Blooms room (older children) during the sessional hours. There were three staff working directly with the 12 children in the Buds room (younger children) during the morning session.
- During the operation of the part-time service (Blooms room) 11.30-13.30 there were two staff caring for the 14 children aged 3-4 years.
- There were two staff caring for five children attending on a sessional basis and one child attending on a part time basis for the afternoon session in Buds room. Staff remained in the service after their finish time to facilitate the inspection process.
- (4) The registered provider ensured that the adult child ratio for the:
- (a) Sessional service was correct with five adults caring for 30 children aged 2-4 years.
- (b) For the part-time service two adults cared for the 14 children in the Blooms room and one child remained with the younger children where two adults cared for five children attending on a sessional basis and the one child remaining in the service for part-time care.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

(1) There were 17 children attending the Blooms room and 12 children attending the Buds room on the morning of the inspection. An enrolment form was available for each of the children in attendance. Of these files 13 were assessed for completeness, the following sections were complete on all enrolment forms, (a), (d), (e,) & (i) as indicated above.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) (b) The record on when the child first attended the service was not completed on three of the 13 records assessed.
- (c) The ability to record the end date for each child was not available on the enrolment forms of five children.
- (f) The details of any illness, allergy or disability were not recorded on the forms of four children whose files were assessed.
- (g) The name of the child's general practitioner was not recorded on the form for one child.
- (h) The record of immunisations was not available for nine children whose forms were assessed.

Not having completed enrolment forms with up to date and accurate details for each child may impede their care within the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) (b) (c) (f) (g) & (h) The requirements have all been updated on the enrolment forms and the registered provider has committed to ensuring all forms will be completed prior to children starting in the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

(1) The corrective and preventive action form is accepted as proof that the enrolment forms have been updated and completed.

Summary Comment

The requirements for this Regulation have been met.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;

(j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;

(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1) (i) The staff roster was the same every week with no changes. The staff signed in daily.

(j) One episode of medication administration occurred and the records for this were reviewed. This record was maintained correctly.

(k) Four accident and incident forms were completed in 2023, all four forms were completed correctly with staff and parent signatures indicating that the information of the accident/incident was given to the parents to ensure continuity of care for the children when they returned home.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

BASIC NEEDS

- The children in each of the two care rooms ate together for their snack in the morning. The children that remained on for the part-time service between the two rooms ate together in the afternoon. No child was heard to state they were hungry between meals.
- The water bottles for each child were easily accessible throughout the day.
- The children used the toilet when needed and the children who needed assistance were helped and reminded to wash their hands.
- Nappies were changed when required.
- Children dressed in full cover painting bibs in the Buds room when they were painting with twigs and leaves to protect their clothing.
- When going outside the children in the Blooms room, who were accessing the planting tunnel and the garden area were dressed in waterproof clothing and in wellington boots. The children from the Buds room put on coats when going outside to the tarmacadam and concrete area.
- The children attending Buds room had a couch that may fit 3-4 children in the rest area, this would allow them to rest and opt out of activities.
- The child who required an individual care plan had same available and this was completed by the staff and the medical care professionals on an ongoing basis.
- The temperatures in the care rooms were recorded at 20.1 and 19.4°C in Buds and Blooms rooms respectively ensuring a comfortable play environment for the children.
- Childrens handwashing and personal hygiene was assisted by the staff.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND CHILDREN:

- Mealtime was sociable with the staff in both rooms sitting with and conversing with the children creating a sociable environment.
- The staff caring for the children created a supportive environment, assisting each child as required with snacks, painting or other activities such as playing with leaves, seeds and when playing outside.
- Communication with parents and guardians was at drop off and collection.
- Transitions were managed by giving adequate notice of changes in the day and when children were transitioning to part-time care or going home all children in the Blooms rooms at together having a story read to them to allow for the easy transition.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

- Both playrooms had appropriate height tables and chairs.
- Sensory play was developed through playing with moulding clay, play with coloured rice and sand and painting. Children were observed to assist the staff to make the play dough and mix the ingredients.
- Fine motor development was encouraged through the use of activity boards, with zips, buttons and fasteners and painting with leaves and seeds in the Buds room.
- Gross motor development was evidenced outside with children on balance bicycles, ride on toys, balls and access to grass and hard surfaces where the children ran and played freely.
- Imaginary play was developed through room layout in home, garage and shop areas.
- The outdoor area was developed to allow the children plant and harvest vegetables and also a large sand house had been erected where the children could play in large volumes of sand and pretend, they were playing on the beach, this area was covered and could be used all year round.

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES

- The plan for each day was similar with accessing the outdoor space a significant part of each day, the outdoor space was accessed before and after snack time and for the children remaining in the service for part-time care these children played outside before their main meal.
- All children were noted to have the opportunity to learn through play for example: the children's physical and gross motor development was enhanced through outdoor play.
- Speech and language development was through conversation, rhymes and storytelling.

OUTDOOR AREA:

The outdoor area was laid out into three distinct areas.

- The first area beside the Buds rooms had a tarmac/concrete surface and the children were playing on bicycles and ride on toys. They had access to a slide, a playhouse and played in small groups with bubbles in the wind.
- The second area was adjacent to the outdoor classroom that had a covered area and an open area, there were tyres buried in the ground for balancing and play kitchens and mud areas for digging.
- The third area was where the sand house and play-tunnel for planting was located and the children from the Blooms room accessed this area on the day of inspection and were observed to harvest tomatoes, cucumbers and spinach.

Non-Compliance Information

BASIC NEEDS

1. The rest area in the Blooms room was insufficient for the numbers of children cared for in this room to allow them to rest and relax and allow them to opt out of activities, there was a small child sized couch that would fit 1-2 children when 17 children were attending this area on the day of inspection. Circle time was held on the ground in another part of the room.
2. The need for privacy was not afforded to the six children who had their nappies changed, the door to the toilet area was left open and the staff and children in the Blooms room could see the child being changed, this did not support the dignity of the child being changed.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT

3. The open shelving that was accessible to the children did not have sufficient resources to allow the children to choose what they played with. In the blooms room 2 tractors and a truck was on the shelves and in the Buds room the activity boards that the children had played with earlier in the morning was on the accessible shelves. All other equipment was stored higher and out of reach. This allowed for the adults to choose what the children played with and did not offer the children independent choice in their activities. Not affording the children choice limits their ability to make decisions and develop independent thinking.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) The registered provider has committed to ensuring that the children have adequate space to rest and the rest area has been equipped with bean bags to suit the numbers of children attending. The rest area in the outdoor classroom is also available to the children.

(2) The door to the nappy changing area is now closed for nappy changing and the registered provider has committed to ensuring that the door is closed when children are having their nappies changed.

(3) The shelving includes resources that support children's emerging interests and additional resources have been added to support this. The outdoor environment is the predominant learning environment.

Supporting documentation submitted

The minutes of the staff meeting and the corrective and preventive action submission have been received which supports the actions taken by the registered provider as outlines above.

Summary Comment

The requirements for this Regulation have been met.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The children's snacks and lunches were provided by parents/guardians.

The food observed was healthy and nutritious.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

A registered provider shall ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a pre-school child attending the service and that the environment of the service is safe.

Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The entrance to the service was secured. The gate was secured with running bolts on the inside and on the outside with the outside lock secured with a secure clasp. These measures ensured that no child could gain unauthorised access to the outside carpark. The external doors of the service were secured with a thumb turn lock.
- The outdoor area with the tyres was flooded, this area was not used on the day of inspection due to the water collection as it posed risk of drowning to the children, the registered provider stated she was taking remedial action to prevent the water collection reoccurring.
- The doors to the storage area beside the adult toilet was secured.
- The hot water in the Blooms room and in the children's, toilets was adequately warm to ensure good hand hygiene. The hot water in the adult toilet was fixed late in the morning where the incorrect switch was turned on earlier.
- The fire exits were unobstructed and easily opened on the day of inspection.
- The window openings were out of the reach of the children.
- There were no hot drinks consumed in the service during its operation.
- All toys were in good condition with no pinch or crush points noted.
- Cleaning and disinfection products were stored in the storage area beside the adult toilet which was secured. The disinfectant used for the nappy changing area was stored up high and out of reach of the children.
- No loose or exposed electric cables were evident in the care rooms.

Infection Control:

The service followed best practice guidelines in the management of the spread of infection for the following:

- A cleaning schedule was observed and signed by the staff in the Buds room.
- The tables were cleaned before and after snack time with a cleaning product suitable for use with children.
- There was hot water available in the children's and adult toilets. Liquid soap and paper towels were available at all sinks to ensure the children and staff could wash their hands as required.

- The children's snacks from both care rooms were stored in the fridge to prevent contamination and potential illness from perishable items contained in the snacks.
- Children were observed to wash their hands after messy and outdoor play, after toileting and before eating.

Administration of Medication:

- The safe administration of medication was indicated by the records maintained following the event when medication was administered.

Safe Sleep:

- There were records available for the staff to record sleep checks should a child sleep in the service, however the registered provider stated that no child sleeps in the service.

Fire Safety:

- The fire extinguishers were not accessible to the children.
- The fire exit door was not obstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Nappies were observed to be changed and after each nappy change the hands of the children were not washed, this was not the procedure set out in the policy where children's hands were to be washed after nappy changing. Not washing hands may cause contamination and a spread of infection within the service.
2. A staff member was observed to not change their apron between nappy changes when the nappy changed had been soiled/wet. Not changing personal protective equipment between nappy changes may allow for contamination and therefore cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. The registered provider has committed on the corrective and preventive action form that the staff have been reminded and informed on the need for each child to have their hands washed and dried after nappy changing.
2. The registered provider has stated that the staff have been reminded of the need to change their single use apron between each nappy change to prevent contamination.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

The minutes of the staff meeting have been received which outline the information and training given by the registered provider as outlined in the corrective and preventive action response.

Summary Comment

The requirements for this Regulation have been met.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

- (a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and*
- (b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.*

Compliance Information

- (1) Records available indicated that four staff had up to date training in first aid responder and one staff had training in basic first aid. This ensured that the children attending the service had a person trained in first aid immediately available to them at all times.
- (2) The registered provider ensured that there was suitably equipped first aid supplies available to the children at all times.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The last fire drill was completed on 31.08.2023, evidence was available to indicate that monthly fire drills had been completed in the last academic year.
 - (b) The service records for the firefighting equipment indicated the equipment was serviced in November 2022. The service record for the smoke detection equipment (Alarm) indicated the smoke detectors were last serviced on 10.08.2023.
- (2) (c) The records as above were open for inspection by the inspector.
- (4) The notice for the procedure to follow in the event of an emergency was displayed in the service at the back door.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

The services insurance record stated the service was insured for 31 children to attend at any one time and to operate as a part-time service. The insurance is in date until 27.03.2024.