

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC183		
Name of Service:	Hillcrest Montessori School		
Address of Service:	Coorycullane, Dunmanway Cork		
Eircode:	P47 TA46		
Name of Registered Provider:	Catherine O' Farrell		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	31/01/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	11	PM
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Social Work Dept, Hospital Grounds, Coolnagarrane, Skibbereen, West Cork P81 PD78		
Inspection undertaken by:	Margaret Carney		
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		

Description of service

Hillcrest Montessori is a private service that is registered to provide an early year setting for children aged from 2 to 6 years on a sessional basis.

It operates from 9:00am to 12:00pm. daily.

The service occupies a single storey, purpose-built chalet style structure situated on the grounds of a private residence on a perimeter road in Dunmanway, west Cork.

The children have access to a playroom, toilet facilities and spacious outdoor gardens.

There is ample car parking available for the safe arrival and departure of the children with their families.

Staffing

The registered provider has employed 3 childcare professionals to work directly with the children.

Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) certification in childcare training at Level 7 was available for each staff member.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Childcare 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 person in charge, the deputy and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises.*

(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

(1)(a)

The registered provider had employed a person in charge to operate the service and work directly with the children. A deputy had been appointed to deputise as required.

(b)

The person in charge and the deputy were present at the time of the inspection and were to hand to assist with the inspection process. Examination of the staff roster indicated that 2 adults were always on the premises during service operation.

(2)(a) & (b)

There was a total of 3 adults employed in the service. Each of their files were examined with the following information recorded -

There were 5 written past employer references available with the correct records of validation attached.

There was 1 written reference from a source that the registered provider considered to be reputable with a record of validation.

(c)

There were 3 up to date Garda vetting disclosures on file.

(d)

Police vetting was not required for the staff members as they had not lived outside the jurisdiction of Ireland for a period of 6 consecutive months or longer.

(4)

Quality Qualifications Ireland (QQI) in childcare training were on file at Level 7 for each staff member.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(3)

There were 11 children aged from 3 to 4 years attending on a sessional basis with 2 adults in attendance.

The adult child ratios were correct.

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)
Each of the children’s enrolment forms attending the service on the day were reviewed to ensure they contained the required elements of Regulation 15(a) to (i). Each of the 11 forms were found to be compliant.

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:

- (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

The following records were reviewed in relation to the service –

(1) (j) & (k)

The service had logbooks on file to document accidents and incidents that had occurred in the service and a logbook for recording of any medications that was to be administered to a child; both books had been developed by an agency associated with early years settings. There were no entries.

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

Basic Needs:

- The service had a healthy eating policy in place which stipulated that the parents and guardians supplied their children with all their drink and food items.
- The lunch meal was eaten mid-session, with the children assisting with preparing the table, removing the lunches from the fridge and happily sitting with their friends in a companionable manner.
- The staff members joined the children and assisted with the opening of cartons and unscrewing bottles.
- The children were observed to independently use the toilet facilities and were gently reminded by the adults to wash hands and discard of paper towels.
- The children's personal belongings such as outdoor wear and bags were stored at child height on a unit to encourage independent dressing and organisation of belongings.
- Aprons were available to protect the children's clothes during arts and crafts or messy play.
- A cosy rest corner was accessible to the children; they were observed using the area during circle time when the children could relax on the low couches.
- Hillcrest Montessori provided sufficient space to allow the children to enjoy free play, structured activities and socialisation.

Physical and Material Environment –

- The service provided a well laid out playroom with sufficient resources and materials for the number of children attending.
- The room was furnished with 3 child sized tables for the children to enjoy tabletop activities and eat their lunches. Child sized chairs were available and were clean and in a good state of repair.
- Low open shelving units displayed the wide range of Montessori equipment and resources so that the children could easily access and participate in fine motor skill play such as, jigsaws, puzzles, beading, matching games and small construction.

- There was a wide range of arts and crafts for the children to develop artistic and creative skills.
- A small child sized kitchen with utensils provided opportunities for pretend play.
- Children were observed enjoying floor play activities with cars and trucks and a wooden train set.
- The walls of the service displayed many of the children’s arts and crafts, ‘the rules of the room’ and a family tree depicting a montage of family photographs.
- Books were pleasingly displayed on a wall mounted bracket by the rest area, where children were observed relaxing and chilling after their lunch, engrossed in the age-appropriate picture books.
- The playroom was clean, bright and well maintained. Strip lighting and natural light from the Georgian square windows provided ample light and ventilation.
- The children had direct access to a large, secured lawn which was equipped with a wide range of gross motor skill activities for example, slide, mud kitchen, see saw, balls and basketball net, hoops, a digging area, water play and sand tables with suitable covers.
- There was a playhouse and a large, canopied area with fun activities to provide shelter during damper weathers.
- Evidence of the children’s planting were displayed in pots decorated with windmills.
- The children were eager to capitalise on the bright, crisp but cold day and master gross motor skills such as balance, ball games and chase in the outdoor play area.

Supporting Relations Around the Children

- The childcare professionals were observed to be kind, gentle and dutiful towards each child; only low tones were used and positive interactions were utilised during assistance with care practises and during group floor and one-to-one table top play.
- Active listening was noted when children requested additional time in gardens and when they wished to assist with preparing for lunches.
- The children were observed to be comfortable and familiar with their environment.
- Staff members had availed recently availed of sensory processing online training in order to develop their childcare skills.
- It was evidenced that the staff members had close communication with parents and guardians as a digital application was used for providing families with updates on service news.
- Parents with unique skills and job roles were invited to talk to the children. The children had enjoyed talks from fire man Dave, Garda Dec, a nurse and a dentist.

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

- Hillcrest Montessori School operated a healthy eating policy whereby the parents and guardians provided their children with all their food and drink items.
- The lunch meals were eaten around 11:00am. Tables and seating was arranged so that the children could sit and eat their food in a companionable manner with their friends.
- Staff members ate their snacks whilst sitting with the children and assisted with the opening of boxes and cartons.
- The children were observed eating healthy and nutritious and varied diets for example, ham sandwiches cheese wraps, yogurts, rice cakes and raspberries, strawberries and tangerines.
- Each child had access to their own labelled water bottles which were stored on an accessible shelf so that they could help themselves to drink when thirsty.
- The service made available an ample supply of cutlery and plates available to the children.
- A small countertop fridge was available for the storage of the children’s lunches.

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 main door to the school was secured so as to prevent unauthorized access and stop a child from leaving the premises unsupervised.
- The emergency exit was unobstructed.
- The staff members stored bags and coats out of reach of the children.

- Cables and flexes were not accessible to the children.
- Although the windows were openable they were out of reach of the children.
- Cleaning products were stored on high shelving out of reach of the children.
- The outdoor play area was checked prior to the children being taken out to play.

Infection Control:

- Hillcrest Montessori School was clean, well maintained, airy and bright. Cleaning schedules were maintained to evidence that thorough cleaning duties were completed.
- A sanitising unit was placed at the entrance of the service for adult use.
- Children were observed practising regular handwashing for example, prior to lunch after activities and toileting.
- There were 2 toilet cubicles, although only 1 was in use on the day of the inspection as the pull cord for the heater had broken and was awaiting repair. The toilets were functioning and clean.
- There were 2 wash hand basins available to the children with thermostatically controlled hot water which registered at 32.9 degrees Celsius for hand washing purposes. Liquid soap and paper towels were also available.
- A hand washing poster prompted the correct hand washing technique.
- A step up was available for the children's safety and comfort whilst hand washing.
- Non-contact pedal bins were situated throughout the service.
- The staff members had access to a designated toilet in the residence nearby. This facility was also clean and well maintained.

Administration of Medication:

- The person in charge stated that there were no children attending the service that had a care plan in place that required medications.
- It was reported that the adults were familiar with the steps that are to be followed in the event of a child requiring either emergency, over the counter or prescribed medications.
- There were currently no children attending the service that required medications.

Fire Safety:

- The fire door was unobstructed.
- Fire cylinders were safely anchored to the walls.

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)
On review of the personal files, it was noted that the deputy had completed first aid responder (FAR) training; the expiry date was August 2025. The remaining childcare professionals in the service had up to date paediatric first aid training certification on file.

(2)(a) & (b)

The first box was stored on a high shelf in the playroom, out of the children's reach but accessible to the staff. The first aid box was adequately equipped with medical supplies in date.

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 firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premise.
- (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

- (a) The person in charge made available a template a recording book that detailed when monthly fire drills had taken place; the last recorded drill had been conducted on 10 January 2024, there were 12 children present with 2 adults supervising the event. It had taken 2 minutes to complete.
- (b) A record was in place which detailed the number, type, and maintenance record of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms. The most recent service had been conducted in August 2023.
- (4)
A fire evacuation plan was displayed in the playroom. It provided a visual route of the procedures that are to be followed in the event of a fire. The fire assembly point was clearly identified in the gardens.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service was insured to accommodate up to 14 children on a sessional basis.
The expiry date was 27 November 2024.