

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CN042		
Name of Service:	Little Willows Montessori		
Address of Service:	No 1 The Willows, Chapel Road, Bailieborough, Co. Cavan		
Eircode:	A82 KT78		
Name of Registered Provider:	Amanda Kelly		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	21/01/2026		
No of pre-school children:	AM	16	PM -
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84		
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna		
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	Not Applicable		

Description of service

Little Willows is a privately owned service which commenced in 2005 and provides a sessional service to children aged 2 to 6 years. The service operates from 9.30am to 12.30pm and caters for a maximum of 30 children. The service is located in a converted 2-storey house in the town of Bailieborough Co. Cavan. The preschool operates on the ground floor only, which extends over 3 rooms operating in a free flow system for the children. There is a staff toilet, children's sanitary accommodation and a kitchen area which is located at the rear of the ground floor. The children did not have access to the upstairs. There is an enclosed outdoor area to back of the building.

Staffing

There are 3 staff members employed in the service, including the registered provider who works daily in the service. Three transition year students currently attend on work placements, one of whom was present on the day of inspection.

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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding

Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures and Regulation 28 Insurance.

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, staff 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, and

(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 service had a designated person in charge, who is the registered provider and a named person to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation, the designated person in charge or the named person in charge are on the premises.

(2) The files for 3 staff and 3 transition year students were reviewed.

(a) (b)

Two written and validated references were on file for the three staff members.

A total of 4 written references from a reputable source were on file for two students.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 3 staff. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for 6 employed staff. Garda vetting is not required for the three transition year students aged under 18 years old.

(d) A review of the employment history for 3 staff and students demonstrated that no one had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months as an adult, therefore police vetting is not required.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the 3 staff employed to work with children held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications. A qualification for the three transition year students was not required.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) (b)

The registered provider had not carried out the validation process on four written references for two students. There were no written references available for one student.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) (b)

I have got the students 4 references and they are validated. When I get the student references, I will validate them immediately.

I have received the 2 references for the one student one work placement and they are validated. I will ask the student to send me their 2 references before they can start their work placement.

Supporting documentation submitted

Six written and validated references submitted.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 9 (2) (a) and (b).

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.

(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

(1) On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(3) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at maximum attendance. Three adults cared for 16 children aged 3 years 4 months to 5 years attending on a sessional basis.

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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being were facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

The children take in their own snack from home, which included a variety of cheese snacks, sandwiches, wraps, crackers and fruits. At snack time, the children were observed to be independent and collect their lunch bags from the lunch trolley and their drink bottles from their bags. The children were observed to use the toilet independently. Rest areas in the Preschool included soft mats, blankets and cushions where children were observed to make themselves cosy and lie down to rest during their time at preschool. The children experienced a change of environment to the outdoors after their morning snack time, which was before home time. The children wore coats outdoors and spent time playing in the covered section due to the weather on the day of inspection.

Supporting Relationships

The atmosphere upon the inspector's arrival was inviting and engaging. The children were observed to lead their own play in 2 out of three areas, and the third room was set up and in use for planned creative activities. The staff used gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of other children's feelings and encouraged sharing and turn-taking among their friends. The children were observed to enjoy listening to stories being read to them and chose which story they would like to listen to. The children appeared familiar with those who cared for them, and discussions about the children's family life and an upcoming holiday to Disneyland demonstrated strong connections between staff, children and their families. Communication with parents is conducted through in person at arrival and collection times, which was observed on the day when parents were given information on how their child was in preschool that day.

Physical And Material Environment

The preschool rooms were comfortable and laid out to suit the needs of the children in attendance. One room located to the front right of the premises was used for small group work time and a creative activity, such as painting on the day of inspection, this room also had dress-up clothing and a variety of jigsaws and books available. The room at the rear, incorporating the kitchen area, had a cosy rest area, construction toys and small world equipment to include train sets, farm toys, and play materials for use. The third room, to the front left of the premises, had a variety of Montessori materials, books, children's individual memory books, creative materials, jigsaws and small and large building blocks available. Materials were freely available to the children, who were observed to lead their own play and choose where and what to play with. A family tree, birthday display and children's creative work and photos of them during play were on display throughout the preschool. The outdoor area is spacious and laid out well to accommodate a variety of play opportunities for the children. A soft-surfaced

area directly outside the back of the premises has rocking toys and a climbing structure for children's use. A grassed area with goal posts, a water wall, and a covered floor-level sand pit was available. A large, covered area had tables, chairs, wooden play kitchens, and construction toys available. This area was observed in use on the day of inspection.

Programme of Activities

A key worker system was in place, and child-sized memory books were available for each child. The book reflects the child's journey from the start of the preschool year and is displayed on low-level shelving for the children to access when they wish. One child saw the inspector looking at these books and took great pride in showing and talking to the inspector about the photos in his memory book. Curriculum planning was in place, with displays linked to recent themes such as space, construction and winter. The staff introduced new words and a new song to the children in line with their theme of exploring France. The children were observed to enjoy learning and taking part in the new song and new words in French. Participation was child-led, where children, if they chose not to take part in a specific activity, that they can opt out and play in an area or with toys of their choice

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 entrance door was secured upon the inspector's arrival. The entrance door remained locked at all times when not in use during the inspection, ensuring no unauthorised person could enter the building or no child could leave the building unsupervised. Storage areas were inaccessible to children. Cleaning products were stored safely out of the reach of children. Play equipment and resources were observed to be maintained in good condition. The children were adequately supervised throughout the inspection process. The outdoor area is secured with wooden fencing and gates. Risk assessments were completed daily and kept up to date. The children did not have access to the first floor on the premises, and the stairway was secured with a gate. Blind cords where present were out of reach of children.

Infection Control:

Handwashing was observed to take place after the children used the toilet and before snack time. Warm water, hand soap, bins, and paper towels were available at each wash hand basin. The care rooms were ventilated through openable windows and sanitary areas through trickle vents. Cleaning schedules were in place, up to date and completed by the relevant staff. The children's snacks taken in from home were stored in the fridge. External waste bins were stored securely and were inaccessible to the children.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The surfaces of the radiators in the care rooms and children's toilets were recorded at 49.9°C to 50.2°C, which poses a risk of injury to a child. It is acknowledged that when the inspector brought this to the attention of the registered provider, the radiators were adjusted and then were then recorded between 26.8°C and 33 °C.
2. It was noted that while the heating was running, there appeared to be fumes in the kitchen area and within the cupboard next to the outside burner where the heating controls were situated. When brought to the attention of the registered provider, they advised that the area where the heating pipes enter the building needs to be sealed and has arranged for this to be completed.

Fire Safety:

3. Records available for review demonstrated that the fire extinguishers were last serviced in November 2024, and not annually, which is required by the fire safety in preschool guidelines.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Registered Provider has talked to a plumber, and he will put a thermostat on the radiator to control the heating to the right temperature. Check the radiators regularly with a thermometer, especially for radiators.
2. Registered Provider got in touch with a plumber about where the heating pipes are in a press, and he is going to get a cover to seal them up to stop the fumes coming out. If the fumes smell again, I will contact a plumber immediately.

Fire Safety;

3. I rang my fire extinguisher company, and they told me they didn't do it anymore. I had to get on to a new company, and they have come out and serviced them. Check my fire cert every year and ring the company to come out and service it.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photo of thermostatic control on radiator and records of radiator temperature logs.
2. A letter from plumber dated 26/02/2026 confirming parts are ordered, which will take 3 to 4 weeks to arrive, and that works will be carried out when received.

Fire Safety:

3. Maintenance certificate for fire extinguishers dated 09/02/2026.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted for non-compliances numbered 1 and 3 above has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23.

The non-compliance numbered 2 above has not yet been completed; therefore, it remains outstanding and will be reviewed upon the next inspection.

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) The registered provider ensured that a person who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. The registered provider held an in-date FAR training certificate and was rostered to work on the day of inspection.

(2) (a) & (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available on the premises and was stored in an accessible and conspicuous location out of the reach of children.

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 premises.
- (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) A record of the fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded on 17 December 2025.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated November 2024, and the smoke alarms were dated 18 August 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls throughout the preschool, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 30 pre-school children attending the service on a sessional basis. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026.