

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW023
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Name of Service:	Little Learners Montessori
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Address of Service:	Phelan Street, Rathvilly, Co. Carlow
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sharon Molloy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	10/09/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	13	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Tusal Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow
Inspection undertaken by:	Norma Thornton
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
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Description of service

Little Learners Montessori is a sessional early childhood care and education (ECCE) service which is located on Phelan Street in the village of Rathvilly in north county Carlow.

The service operates from a two-storey terraced house on Phelan Street and includes a classroom on the ground floor with an outdoor play area which can be directly accessed from the back door of the premises.

Staffing

There were three staff employed in the service including the registered provider. All three staff members hold qualification in early childhood care and education ranging from Level 5 to Level 7 on the national Quality and Qualifications Ireland 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.

The inspection focused on assessment of compliance under regulations 9, 10, 11, 17, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 28

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations 10, and 23.

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.

Additional Information

The inspection was triggered by receipt of information submitted to the Inspectorate.

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
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(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 was present on the day of inspection and there was a second named person available to deputise as required.

(b) The inspector was informed by the registered provider that while the preschool service is in operation, the registered provider or the named deputy designated person in charge was onsite.

(c) In the entrance hall where parents met with the staff transitioning their children in and out of the service, there was a poster with each staff's name, qualification, role and responsibility displayed.

(2) Staff files for the three staff members were reviewed by the inspector and the following observations found.

(a)(b) There were two references available in each of the two staff members, from either a past employer or reputable source in the case of a person who had no past employers. Two of these references had been validated.

(c) Garda vetting disclosure certificates were on file for each of the staff employed in the service including registered provider. The registered provider demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was not required as no member had lived outside of the State for a period of six months or longer.

(4) Certificates of accredited qualifications were available in each of the staff members' files demonstrating that each staff member held a qualification ranging from Level 5 to Level 8 on the national Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework.

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

On the day of inspection the following policies as specified in Schedule 5 were available for inspection in the service. The inspector found the following policies that were available, to be adequate in content and appropriate to the sessional service on offer- the service's Statement of Purpose and Function, Policy on Administration of Medication, Fire Safety Policy, Policy on Outings, Policy on Healthy Eating, Settling in Policy and Supervision of staff Policy.

Non-Compliance Information

1. The following policies required by Schedule 5 were not available in the service on the day of inspection- Policy on Authorisation to Collect Children, Recruitment Policy, Risk Management Policy.
2. While a Complaints policy was available, it did not detail the procedures for making a complaint, the process of how complaints are managed and responded to, how the complainant is kept informed and the process for storage of complaint records and the timeframe for retention of these records.

The registered provider had previously been requested to review the service's complaints policy on the 25 January 2024 by the Early Years Inspectorate Feedback and Concerns Department, who had also provided the Registered Provider with a guidance document to support with revision of the service's Complaints Policy.

3. The service's Policy on Infection Control did not include details of how the registered provider and staff safely managed and stored perishable food in the service or included the exclusion periods for children suffering from an infectious illness from the service.
4. The service's Policy on Managing Behaviour required expansion on the practices that are prohibited in the service and did not include the procedures for the protection and welfare of children in line with the service's child safeguarding statement.
5. The service's Inclusion Policy did not detail how the service recognises and responds to bias or discrimination nor stated how the service ensures that the needs of all children attending are addressed.
6. While a Safety Statement was available, an Accident and Incident Policy was not available setting out the procedures to be followed in the event of an accident and incident involving a pre-school child attending the service occurring. The management, recording of, communication with parents/guardians and post incident risk assessment was not detailed.
7. The service's Policy on Outdoor Play did not include details of how children are supervised while outdoors, it did not set out the procedure for carrying out risk assessments in the outdoor area or set out the safety requirements of the outdoor area.
8. The service's Policy on the Use of the Internet and Photographic and Recording Devices did not clearly state that consent is required from parents/ guardians before a child is photographed in the service, it did not detail how images are stored or set out the procedures for storage and retention of images in the service.
9. The staff training policy did not describe the induction process of new staff into the service; it did not detail what ongoing training and professional development was available or detail how staff training records were maintained in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider has responded with the following corrective and preventive actions.

Corrective and Preventive Action

I have re done all the policies and procedures and have attached them to the email.

I will review and make amendments to these policies yearly if not beforehand and keep them up to date going forward. I will also summaries these policies into a parent handbook which I am currently in the middle of doing.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of the revised policies and procedures as required in the non-compliances

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliances. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on next inspection.

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) Throughout the inspection, there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.
- (3) There were three qualified staff members present with 13 pre-school children aged 2years 6 months to 4 years. A transition year student was also present.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Non-Compliance Information

It is acknowledged that the information required to be provided to parents, referred to in regulation (16)(1)(a)-(g), was available in part, in the documents displayed in the service's entrance hall and on request by informed parents. However, the registered provider did not provide this information to parents/guardians of children proposing to attend the service. Parents were not provided with the documented information outlining the specific details of the service provided, number and qualification details of staff employed to work with the children, facilities available in the service, the type of programme of care available and, opening hours and fees and the necessary policies and procedures that parents should be informed of prior to their child commencing in the service.

The only other means of communication with parents was providing evidence of the children's activities via a media application or by sending each individual child's learning journal home with the child at the end of each month.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

I am currently in the middle of designing a parent's handbook with a summary of the preschool curriculum, policies and procedures, which I will give to all parents before their child begins, I will have copies readily avail on request and copies for display purposes.

All parents receive an email with all information regarding their child beginning preschool weeks before their child start. This gives the parents plenty of time to think of any questions or address any concern with the service provider before their child commences. Included in the email is the date for a parent's coffee morning before children begin preschool, where service providers and staff meet all parents and children. All information is discussed to parents face to face during this time. I have attached this year's email that the parents received before their child started preschool.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of email sent to parents

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliance. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on next inspection.

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.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that no corporal punishment is inflicted on a pre-school child whilst attending the service.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that no practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of a pre-school child whilst attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b) The inspector observed that the pre-school classroom provided an inviting physical environment to engage children in interesting areas and activities from the moment they entered the classrooms. The front windows of the service displayed seasonal pieces of art that the children had recently created in conjunction with the curricular themes that were documented in the short-term planning record on the classroom wall. Activity tables had been prepared by staff to invite the children to play. These included a play dough table with shape cutters, rolling pins and sensory materials, a cutting and gluing table where the inspector observed children develop their fine motor skills by cutting pictures to glue and for a larger picture. Other children played freely in the kitchen home area where the kitchen table had been laid, and children were making imaginary pizza. Children demonstrated that they were already familiar and confident in their environment at this early stage of the school year by fetching toys that they were eager to play with and playing in groups to build train tracks and a train station.

Staff were observed to encourage this independence by standing back and observing. Staff provided positive reinforcement verbally and visibly, smiling and praising the children's sharing, working together and taking turns. Other children that required building on their confidence were gently supported and guided to toys or play materials that they were eager to have a go with. Staff encouraged the children to express their desire to have a turn and to ask their friends for a go.

Each child had access to the drinking station where they positioned their individual drinking bottles each morning. At snack time the children were prompted to start preparing when the staff mentioned singing the "tidy up" song. Children enthusiastically and familiarly sang their song putting away the toys and play materials before going to wash their hands prior to getting their lunch bags from the refrigerator. At snack time the three staff in the service each sat at one of the three tables, also enjoying their snack and chatting with the children about their daily lives, plans and activities. Snacks were observed to contain healthy foods such as yogurts, sandwiches, crackers, cheeses, fruit and vegetables. One child who was a vegetarian was encouraged to talk about what being a vegetarian meant, and children were curious to ask the child questions.

Children had great conversation discussing what vegetables they grew, and one child chatted lovingly about growing vegetables with their grandmother.

One child was observed not to be eating but once supported and cuddled by a staff member was happier trying some of their lunch. The inspector observed that the children enjoyed their snacks in a lovely unhurried atmosphere with emphasis placed on getting to know each other during this time, which was one of the curricular themes planned for the month of September.

Visual prompts throughout the classroom reassured the children as to where play materials and equipment were stored and of their daily pre-school schedule.

After snack time, some children asked to go outside, while others continued to enjoy snack time at their leisure. The three staff members were observed to position themselves throughout the indoor, covered outdoor classroom and outdoor area to ensure all the children were observed and supervised in the activities that they were enjoying.

Children in the outdoor area all wore appropriate outdoor clothing and wellies while playing with the water play activity, outdoor sensory trays, chalk boards, construction area and swings and slides.

(2)(3) On observation of the registered provider and staff on the day of inspection, the inspector was assured that the staff were well-informed as to what practices are prohibited in the pre-school service. In discussion with the staff, they demonstrated that they were well informed not only as to what practices were prohibited in a pre-school service but also of their individual roles in safeguarding the children in their care and ensuring that the children are not exposed to any practices that are harmful to the emotional, psychological and physical well-being of a child.

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 service was secured at the main entrance with a red half metal gate in front of the main entrance door, which was secured internally with a twist turn lock. A call bell system was in place for any visitors to the service. The registered provider explained that the half metal gate externally ensured no child could exit unsupervised if there was a visitor to the door. Staff could easily view any callers to the service via the window in the hall or the window in the classroom. The outdoor play area at the back of the building was secured with a ten-foot-high metal fence and a tight secured large gate at the back of the yard.

The inspector observed that cleaning materials and equipment were safely stored away from and inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

There was an adequate number of toilets provided in the service to meet the needs of the children attending the service, and the adults employed in the service.

Child height handwash basins were supplied with liquid hand soap and paper towelling, which the children could easily access and use.

The older children were observed to use the toilet and hand washing facilities independently, while staff supported and assisted the younger children as needed.

Staff were observed to support and prompt the children to wash their hands correctly after using the toilet, nappy-changing, after messy and outdoor play, and before snack times.

Staff were observed to support children's toileting if required in adherence with the service's hand washing and infection control policy and child safeguarding policies.

Administration of Medication:

In general staff informed the inspector that medications were not required to be administered in the service.

However, in discussion with the staff, the inspector observed that they were well informed of the procedures to be followed if a child required anti-febrile medication or a prescribed medication while attending the service, in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

Outing:

A suitable outings policy and procedure was available in the service for staff to follow if they decided to take an outing away from the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider and staff demonstrated to the inspector that each pre-school child's daily attendance and departure times from the service were recorded.

(3)(a)(b) The staff ensured that no other person other than a pre-school child, person dropping or collecting a child, employee or unpaid worker could enter the premises without their entry being approved by an employee. All authorised visitors to the service were required to record the date of entry, their name, contact number, reason for entry, check in and out times on the visitors record book.

(4) The inspector observed that a daily record of any such persons as referred to in (3) was maintained since the 29 September 2020.

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) There were two staff members employed in the service with current certification in the required first aid responder (FAR) training for children.

The registered provider demonstrated that there were at least two staff members with FAR training present in the service while preschool children were in attendance.

(2) (a)(b) A first aid bag which was available to the staff, for the children, was easily accessible on a shelf in the classroom.

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) The following fire safety records were maintained.

(a) There was a written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 12 May 2025, before the service closed for the summer.

(b) A record of the number, type and maintenance of the fire- fighting equipment and smoke alarm system was maintained and demonstrated that the last maintenance check for both was recorded as having taken place on the 21 October 2024.

(4) A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire or for a fire drill was displayed in the classroom.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate displaying adequate insurance for a sessional childcare service for up to 22 preschool children was displayed on the notice board in the entrance hall.

The insurance certificate provided cover from 28 March 2025 to the 27 March 2026.