

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2015DL045

Name of Service: Footprints Montessori

Address of Service: Cashelard, Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal

Eircode: F94 HN36

Name of Registered Provider: Kay Ryan Donagher

Service type: Part Time, Sessional

Date(s) of Inspection: 11/06/2025

No of pre-school children:	AM	17	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	S Killeen
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

Footprints Montessori is a privately owned part time, sessional pre-school. It is located on the outskirts of Ballyshannon, Co. Donegal. The service provides preschool care for children aged 2 to 6 years, Monday to Friday from 9.00am-14.00pm. The service operates from a purpose-built facility adjacent to the registered provider's dwelling house. The children have access to two separate playrooms indoors whereby they can move freely between rooms.

Staffing

There were three adults including the registered provider working directly with children in the service 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 announced/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 an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,19,23,25,26 and 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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
- (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,

(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) (b)

There was a person in charge and a person to deputise as required. The person in charge was on site throughout the inspection.

(c) A clear governance structure was in place, with defined roles and responsibilities. This structure was well understood within the setting and was clearly communicated to the inspector during the visit.

(2) (a) (b)

The records of the three adults employed in the service was reviewed on the day of inspection. Five written and verified past employer references and one references from another source in the absence of a past employer was available for three adults.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for three staff working directly with the children. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years

(4) Three adults had attained major awards in Early childhood care and education at level 5 or above on the national framework of qualifications, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.

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

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times,

Compliance Information

(1)

On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(3)

The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.

(8)

The registered provider ensured that there were always at least two adults on the premises when children were present in the service as evidenced in a sample review of attendance records.

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

- The indoor environment was bright, open, and welcoming, with large windows providing ample natural light. A colourful mural featuring the school's name added a vibrant focal point to the space. The layout included clearly defined interest areas, each stocked with age-appropriate materials to support children's cognitive, social, emotional, and physical development. Two well-equipped playrooms were accessible throughout the session, encouraging independence as children moved freely between activities that matched their interests and needs.
- Playroom One followed a Montessori-inspired approach. It was equipped with a wide variety of educational materials. The materials were neatly displayed on low-level open shelving, making them easily accessible to children and promoting independence, self-direction, and purposeful engagement.
- Playroom Two was designed to foster creativity and imaginative play. It featured a dolls house with miniature furniture, a construction area with blocks of various sizes and textures, and a fully stocked play kitchen. Additionally, this room offered a quiet corner with books, puzzles, and table-top games, supporting literacy, problem-solving, and social interaction in a relaxed setting.
- The walls throughout the service were thoughtfully decorated with displays that reflected the children's lives and learning. These included a family wall with photographs of each child's immediate family to promote a sense of belonging, images of local community landmarks to build familiarity with the surrounding environment, and a mindfulness display that illustrated a range of emotions, helping children to identify and express their feelings.
- The preschool room provided direct access to a large, well-designed outdoor area. This space featured artificial grass surface and a winding stone path that encouraged exploration and movement. A canopy-covered concrete area allowed for outdoor play in all weather conditions, while planting beds along the perimeter offered sensory experiences and opportunities for gardening activities. A raised wooden decking area with steps and a tunnel underneath supported gross motor development through climbing, crawling, and imaginative play.

- A second outdoor play area, situated at the front of the premises, offered a spacious and versatile environment for active and creative play. This area featured a tarmacadam surface alongside a large garden space, providing ample room for a variety of physical activities. During the inspection, children were observed enthusiastically riding trucks, trikes, and tractors, engaging in football games, and using colourful chalk to create drawings on the tarmac. The design of the space encouraged physical development, coordination, and imaginative expression, all within a safe and stimulating setting that supported both individual and group play.
- The environment within the service was calm and welcoming, with a strong focus on the needs and interests of the children. Staff engaged with the children in a genuinely warm and respectful manner, showing active listening and encouraging meaningful dialogue.
- Children preparing for their transition to primary school were observed rehearsing a performance they had been working on for their graduation ceremony. They appeared enthusiastic and proud as they practiced the concert they would soon share with their parents. Two children who had recently been to visit their primary school stood up and spoke with the class about their experience.
- A key working system was in place, with each staff member assigned to a specific cohort of children. Individual learning record books were maintained for each child, documenting their experiences, progress, and development throughout their time in the pre-school.
- Daily communication with parents was evident during both drop-off and collection times, as observed on the day of inspection. This regular interaction supports strong partnerships between staff and families.
- The service actively promoted healthy eating. Children brought snacks from home, and a variety of nutritious options were observed during the inspection. These included ham, cheese, and jam sandwiches, crackers, and a selection of fruits such as strawberries, grapes, and bananas.
- Children had access to their drinks throughout the session. Water bottles were available in the main preschool room, and an additional drink station was set up outside within easy reach, allowing children to stay hydrated whenever they felt thirsty.
- Children accessed toilet facilities in accordance with their individual needs. Child-friendly handwashing posters were displayed to promote proper hygiene practices. Staff supervised handwashing to ensure it was carried out effectively.

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 to the service was secured on the inspector's arrival and remained secured throughout the inspection. Access to the service was controlled by staff members.
- The boundary of the outdoor play area was secured with high-level fencing and a bolted gate.
- There were no trailing cables or electrical hazards observed.
- Cleaning supplies and equipment were stored in areas that were not accessible to children.
- There was impact-absorbent surfacing under high-rise equipment in the outdoor play area, and all play items were well maintained with no observable hazards.
- Materials and equipment were observed to be in a good state of repair.
- Warm running water was available for handwashing at a temperature below 43°C.
- Grapes were observed to be cut in half, reducing the risk of choking.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in the care rooms.
- Foot-operated pedal bins were available within the service for safe disposal of waste and were observed throughout the premises.
- Adequate handwashing facilities were provided throughout the service, with warm water, liquid soap, and paper towels.
- Children were observed to wash their hands with support before snacks and after messy play. Handwashing was supervised by the adults to ensure all hands were cleaned effectively.
- Child-friendly handwashing posters were placed beside the sinks.
- The sanitary facilities were ventilated by openable windows and were observed to be well maintained and clean.

Administration of Medication:

- When interviewed, staff were aware of their responsibilities for the safe administration of medication. No medication was administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were observed to be unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

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 service provided evidence that a person had up to date First Aid Responders (FAR) course and was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)(a) and (b) First aid boxes were available and safely stored in a conspicuous position on the premises.

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-

(a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,

(b) an employee, and

(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) A procedure was in place to practice and record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated the 3rd June 2025.
- (b) A record of the number, type, and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service was on file. Records indicated that the last annual maintenance for the firefighting equipment and the fire detection system was dated 06th January 2025
- (4) Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the care rooms.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had adequate insurance for the number of children in attendance. The insurance certificate was observed to be valid until 27 March 2026.