

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL065
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Name of Service:	Little Acorns Montessori Playschool
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Address of Service:	GAELIC PARK, Carndonagh, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F93 WD62
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Name of Registered Provider:	Jennifer Grant, Sarah Quigley-Burns
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Dates of Inspection:	21/04/2026
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Date 2 of Inspection:	22/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	119	PM	84
Day 2	AM	128	PM	80

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F92 TD92
Inspection undertaken by:	N Toner S Kileen
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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).

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Description of service

This privately operated early years' service is in the town of Carndonagh on the Inishowen peninsula in County Donegal. The service offers full day, part time and sessional preschool care from 7.00hrs to 19.00hrs Monday to Friday. The service is registered to care for children aged 6 months to 6 years. The service is also registered to provide a school aged programme with a breakfast club, afterschool programme and holiday camps. The service operates from 10 ground floor commercial units. One of the units is solely used for the provision of school age care. There is a kitchen on site where meals and snacks are prepared. There are outdoor play areas on both sides of the premises.

Staffing

There are two registered providers in this service. There is a named person in charge and there are persons appointed to deputise in the event of their absence. There were 58 adults working in the service in total. Of the 58 adults, 33 were employed to work directly with pre-school children. There were 6 adults employed to work solely in the school age service. There were 4 adults employed to work in the kitchen, 3 cleaners and 2 maintenance staff. Additionally, there were 2 adults contracted to the service to provide additional activities for children. There were 4 students on placement in the service. There was 2 administrations 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 unannounced and focused on the area of governance/ safety. The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 16k, 16k, 21, 22, 23, 27 and 28. However, on inspection, an

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additional non-compliance identified under Regulation 8. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation 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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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Part II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

Non-Compliance Information

1. The service is registered with Tusla to operate a full day service between the hours of 7.00hrs to 19.00hrs. However, on the day of inspection, the service was operating the hours of 07.00hrs to 18.30hrs. The registered provider did not notify Tusla of the change in operating hours.
2. The service is currently registered with two registered providers. However, on the day of inspection, the inspectors were informed that a change in the one registered providers had occurred. The registered provider failed to notify Tusla of this change in circumstances.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The registered provider has stated that a change in circumstances was submitted regarding the change in operating hours.
2. The registered provider has stated that this was reviewed and that a change in circumstances has been submitted to the inspectorate which will address this matter.

To prevent these non-compliances from reoccurring, the service will ensure that all correct change of circumstances forms will be completed at the same time as notification to other governing bodies.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of two changes in circumstances were submitted to the inspector.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 8. The registered provider has given assurances that any changes in circumstances will be notified to registration office as required.

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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) The registered provider ensured that.

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
- (c) There was 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.

(2)

On the day of inspection, 33 adults were present which included the person in charge, two cooks, and two administrators. 28 adults were employed to work directly with the children on the day of inspection. A review of

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records showed that the vetting documentation for 33 of the adults had been examined during a previous inspection on 18/06/2025 and was found to be compliant. In line with the requirements of Regulation 9, vetting records for 19 adults who had commenced employment since the previous inspection were then reviewed, and the following information was noted.

- (a) 23 written validated references from past employers for 15 of the adults.
 - (b) 15 written validated references from reputable sources for 11 of the adults.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 59 adults.
 - (d) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was available for three adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.
- (4) Eight of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, 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.*
- (2) Subject to paragraphs (4) and (5), a registered provider of a full day care service or a part-time day care service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 1 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) thereof 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 preschool children attending the service.
- (2) The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained throughout the inspection.

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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.

Non-Compliance Information

16 (1)

(J) A sample of accident and incident forms were reviewed since the last inspection. Fifteen incident and accident forms were not signed by parents/ guardians. Three forms were not signed by staff in the service.

(k) A sample of medication administration forms were reviewed since the last inspection. One medication administration form had no parent/ guardian signature.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Reg 16(1) (J) The registered provider has instructed the staff to ensure that all accident/incident forms are signed by the parents. Along with making sure that the parent is notified via text message with a photograph of the injury. The registered provider has instructed all the staff, during staff meetings, on how to complete an accident/incident form and highlighted the importance of following the services policies and procedures. Following inspection, the service has updated their policy to require that, in all cases, parents or guardians must attend in person to review and sign their child's accident/incident forms. Room leaders are responsible for ensuring that their accident/incident forms are signed.

Reg 16 (K) The service has instructed the staff to ensure that all medication forms are signed by the parents. Along with making sure that the parent is notified via text message when their child receives medication. The service has instructed all the staff during staff meetings, how to complete a medication form and highlighted the importance of following policies and procedures. Room leaders are responsible for ensuring that there medication forms are signed.

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The service is currently reviewing staff induction checklists. Currently it includes an information video on recording accidents and incidents. However, the service intends to produce an information guidance video on how to correctly complete a medication booklet. The service will also update the current video that is used during the staff induction.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Photographic evidence was submitted to the inspectorate. This includes, signed accident/incident form, a text message sent to parent with photograph of injury, signed medication form and a photo of staff meeting agenda, where the service discussed the importance of correctly completing forms.
- The service submitted a copy of the updated Accident and Incident Policy and Procedure.
- The service submitted a copy of the Administration of Medication Policy and Procedure.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 16 (1)(j) and 16 (1)(k).

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service was equipped with sufficient, safe, and developmentally appropriate resources to support children's growth, independence, and sense of belonging. Each room of the service contained a variety of equipment to encourage play through learning. This included a library for language development skills and books containing age-appropriate material in each room. There were home corner areas, and a dress up areas with different costumes and uniforms to promote role play and imagination. The rooms included areas for art to promote mark making and creativity. There was also a variety of toys such as dolls, cuddly toys and playhouses. There was a soft corner in each of the rooms varying in sizes to accommodate different child numbers. In the soft corners was comfortable seating areas, soft matts and cuddly toys. Each room contained both a sand table and a water table to promote sensory play.

The service provided adequate and suitable child-sized tables and chairs, appropriate to the age and developmental stage of the children in attendance. Materials were organised on low-level, open storage units in each of the care rooms. This allowed children to see, reach, and return items independently throughout the day.

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The service provided a wide range of developmentally appropriate resources, organised into themed interest areas such as cognitive, sensory, and creative play. Surfaces on furniture and toys appeared smooth, clean and easy to sanitize. Cleaning schedules were in place in each room.

The outdoor area contained a variety of equipment and materials to encourage gross motor skills. This included slides and a mix of large and smaller tyres to promote balance and coordination. There were outdoor sinks in different play areas for children to engage in messy sensory play. Children were enjoying a game of golf with age-appropriate golf equipment supplied to them. There was a swing set in another outdoor space for children to use when not playing with other equipment available such as ride on tractors and cars. The service also had a variety of play equipment such as cars, trucks and a large soft play jigsaw. There were seating areas in all outdoor play areas. Child size tables and chairs were used by children who were taking breaks from play. A mix of manufactured and natural materials were available, and children were seen playing with mud, leaves and grass in an outdoor sink for sensory play. All toys were suitable for the specific age and stage of the children as each outdoor area was divided into sections for the age groups. Enough play materials were available to promote positive peer interactions and minimise potential conflict among the children.

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 service provides breakfast, dinner and snacks daily to children in attendance on a part-time or full day care basis. A copy of the weekly menu was available which detailed the hot meal served to the children. The hot meal was macaroni and cheese on the day of inspection. Children who asked for another portion were accommodated. Meals were adjusted to suit children's preferences, for example, the staff in room 11 advised that they check daily with the children if they would like potatoes or pasta with their dinner. Dinner is cooked on site by a team of cooks daily.

Cereals are offered for breakfast, fruit for a morning snack time, and the planned afternoon snack on the day was pasta, tuna and sweetcorn or waffles and beans. The meals listed on the menu, while taking into consideration the age of children, provided a suitable, nutritious and varied choice for children. The younger children were assisted with their meals in line with their developmental ability. Staff were observed offering them drinks throughout the day, and children who had a bottle were assisted with this.

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The number of meals and snacks provided was linked to the length of the child's session and ensured they remained energized and satisfied. Full Day Care children were offered at least two meals and two snacks including the hot meal. Clean and safe drinking water was always accessible to children. Children helped themselves at mealtimes using jugs of water and small plastic cups. Consultation with staff in Room eleven confirmed a dedicated focus on healthy eating initiatives, supported by ongoing engagement with parents to encourage nutritious choices for the children

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 doors to each unit within the service were found to be secured on arrival, and throughout the day, preventing unauthorised access or exit from the premises.
- The doors to the rear of the care rooms leading to the outdoor area were found to be secured throughout the inspection, preventing unauthorised exit or entry to the service.
- Tall wooden fences were present on the perimeter of the outdoor areas. Gates to the areas were secured with bolts placed up high out of reach of the child, preventing unauthorised exit from the area.

Infection Control:

- The premises materials and resources throughout the preschool were visibly clean with cleaning schedules in place. Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes.
- The care rooms were adequately ventilated with openable windows and doors.
- Foot operated pedal bins were in place throughout the service for the hygienic disposal of waste.

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was observed to be administered on either day of the inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- Adults remained with older children during their rest period and were observed to carry out sleep checks on each child.
- Children were observed to sleep either on floor beds or in cots, according to their age and stage of development. A minimum distance of at least 50cm was observed between sleep equipment.
- Sleep checks were carried out every 10 minutes, with the children's position, breathing pattern and

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colour recorded.

Fire Safety:

- Fire exits were observed to be unobstructed, ensuring safe and immediate exit or access in the event of an emergency.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Water in the sinks both inside and outside of the sanitary areas did not have warm water for effective hand hygiene throughout the service.
2. Children's mattresses were being stored in a storeroom when not in use. The mattresses and sheets were observed touching the floor, which may cause cross-contamination
3. On the day of inspection, after nappy changing, the hands of the babies were observed to be not consistently washed, posing a risk of infection.

Safe Sleep:

4. On the day of inspection, a child aged 12 months was observed sleeping on her tummy. Additionally, in this position, it was difficult for staff to effectively carry out checks, as they could not observe the child's chest rising and falling or the colour of the child's face.
5. The mattress covers appeared too small for the mattress, causing the sides to curl upwards. This may hinder the child's ability to turn if needed.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. Following the closing meeting with the inspectors the service immediately contacted the contractors to begin addressing issues. The service got a plumber to the service to fix or replace the immersion systems in the rooms affected.
2. The children's mattresses are now stored on top of the cots without the sheets, with just mattress protectors on them. They are being dressed daily before sleep time.
3. Nappy Changing Policy clearly details the required handwashing procedures. To further reinforce compliance, all staff members have signed a memo acknowledging their understanding of and commitment to following this policy.

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4. At the time of the inspection, the service contacted parents. When speaking with the parent of a child they expressed that they have no concerns with the child sleeping on her tummy as that is her normal sleeping pattern. The registered provider explained the safe sleep procedures mandated and informed parents that staff will be instructed to turn the child over on her back. The child turned one year old on the day of inspection.
5. Following the inspection management reviewed the mattress covers. It was discovered that the mattress covers were not too small for the mattresses. Instead, they were not put on clearly by staff members. The service has shown each staff member working in the nursery how to put on the mattress covers correctly. Staff have been reminded staff of safe sleep policies and procedures. All staff responsible for the dressing of mattresses have signed a form to say that they will put the mattress covers on correctly. All staff have re-read safe sleep policies and procedures. The registered provider has discussed the importance of safe sleep, lying positions, and how children cannot sleep on their tummies, and how important it is to put mattress covers on correctly.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

Photographic evidence has been submitted to the inspectorate including photos of water temperature checks in all rooms, Invoice from Plumber on completed work on immersion systems, mattresses stored on top of cots and staff signatures on the nappy changing memo.

Safe Sleep:

Photographic evidence has been submitted to the inspectorate including photos of mattress covers put on mattress properly and where staff have signed to confirm that they will put the mattress sheets on properly.

Summary Comment

The responses from the registered provider and supporting documentation submitted has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23, Infection Control and Safe Sleep.

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Part VI – Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

Constant careful supervision by both sight and sound occurred adequately on the day of inspection. Closer supervision was maintained in the outdoor areas to ensure children's safety, where risks are higher, using swings, slides etc. At mealtimes, staff sat with the children while they ate their meals. Appropriate supervision is maintained during toileting via verbal and auditory monitoring, allowing children privacy and the opportunity to develop personal independence in a safe environment. Assistance was provided when required by the child during toileting. Appropriate adult to child ratios was maintained throughout the day. The service offers accessible spaces for quiet or individual play, configured to allow for effective supervision without invading upon the children's sense of independence. The staff team demonstrated consistent and effective supervision of preschool children through strategic positioning across both indoor and outdoor environments. Clear communication between staff members ensures continuous supervision, particularly during transitions and when providing individualised support. Supervision is active and attentive, with staff engaging directly during activities and mealtimes. During sleep periods, ten-minute checks are conducted for children in cots, while staff remain present with those on floor beds. Furthermore, the indoor and outdoor areas are purposefully designed to minimize blind spots and ensure children remain within sight and sound. Safe sleep practices were observed, with staff maintaining constant supervision of sleeping children. Physical sleep checks were performed at ten-minute intervals and contemporaneously recorded in the sleep log.

Part VI – Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured adequate insurance was in place for the full day care service for 253 children from 28 March 2026 to 27 March 2027.