

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015DL065
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	Little Acorns Montessori Playschool
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	GAELIC PARK, Carndonagh, Co. Donegal
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<b>Eircode:</b>	F93 WD62
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Jennifer Grant, Sarah Quigley-Burns
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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<b>Date 1 of Inspection:</b>	17/06/2025
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<b>Date 2 of Inspection:</b>	18/06/2025
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	<b>Day 1</b>	AM	113	PM	67
	<b>Day 2</b>	AM	112	PM	N/A

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
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<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	N McEndoo & K Folan
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<b>Title:</b>	Early Years Inspectors
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### 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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable
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### Description of service

This privately operated early years' service is located 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 -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 and served. There are outdoor play areas on both sides of the premises.

### Staffing

There are two registered providers, one of which was present on the day of inspection. The childcare manager is the named person in charge and there are persons appointed to deputise in the event of her absence. There were 52 adults working in the service inclusive of one of the registered providers. Of the 51 staff members, 43 were employed to work directly with pre-school children, 4 were employed to work solely in the school age service and 4 were employed to work in the kitchen, as maintenance or on cleaning duties. Additionally, there were 2 adults contracted to the service to provide additional activities for children.

### 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 and 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 the following regulations.

- Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment (1), (2), (4), (7).
- Regulation 11 - Staffing levels (1), (3).
- Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service (1) (i), (j) and (k).
- Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child (1) (a) and (b).
- Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child.
- Regulation 28 – Insurance.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16 (1) (i), (j) and (k), 19 (1) (a) and (b) and 23. As a result, the scope of the inspection included, Junior Nursery, located in rooms 12 and 13, the Senior Nursery located in room 10, Room 14a, 16, and room 17.

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 registered providers, person in charge, 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)

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, 30 adults were present, the registered provider, the person in charge, two cooks, an administrator, this also includes 25 adults who were employed to work directly with the children. A review of records showed that the vetting documentation for 34 of the adults had been examined during a previous inspection on 28/06/2024 and was found to be compliant.

In line with the requirements of Regulation 9, vetting records for 15 adults who had commenced employment since the previous inspection were then reviewed, and the following information was noted.

- (a) 24 written validated references from past employers for 14 of the adults.
- (b) 5 written validated references from reputable sources for 4 of the adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 55 adults.
- (d) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was available for one adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

(4) Twelve 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.

### Non-Compliance Information

- (2)
- (a)(b)
- One written and validated reference was not available in respect of one staff member.
- (d)
- It could not be determined if police vetting was required in respect of one staff member due to the absence of an employment record.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

The reference was misfiled under another staff members reference and was located. Confirmation of the gap in employment was sought from the member of staff.

Regular audits of files already completed will ensure that gaps in employment are on file and that references are not misfiled. All future staff member CV's will be checked for extended gaps in employment and a Gap in Employment form will be completed by the prospective employee.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

Scan of required documentation submitted.

## Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted have been reviewed. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 9 have been adequately addressed.

## 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.

## 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:*

- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (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.*

*(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.*

## Compliance Information

(1)

(i)

Records pertaining to a staff roster was held for adults working directly with children.

(3)

Records regarding Regulation 16 (1) (i), (j) and (k) were present on the premises and made available to the inspectors on the day of inspection.

## Non-Compliance Information

(j)

It could not be confirmed that the parents of children who had received medication had been informed. While incidents of administration are recorded on a communication platform, there was no evidence of parental acknowledgement confirming they had noted the administration. This could lead to potential risk to a child.

(k)

A sample of accident and incidents records involving a pre-school child were reviewed for this regulation. The following information had been omitted from the forms.

- The signature of the parent was not present on six of the forms.
- The manager's signature was omitted from two of the forms.

## Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

### **Corrective and Preventive Action**

A staff meeting was held by the person in charge following the inspection. The non-compliance was addressed in relation to the necessity of parent signatures and parent acknowledgement. Risks of risks to over/under medicating children were discussed if no signature or confirmation from parents are held on file. Our service's liability and duty of care was highlighted.

Staff induction procedures will include detailed training on the correct completion of the medication administration procedure. This will be carried out by a video produced by the person in charge and registered provider, similar to the Accident and Incident Recording Procedure currently produced. A written confirmation by each staff member will be obtained and held on each staff member's file. Regular audits of completed and in use

administration of medication records will ensure that checks are carried out by management to ensure that correct information is supplied by the administrator of the medication and that any omissions or errors will be brought to the attention of specific staff members for continued best practices and continued professional development.

**Supporting documentation submitted**

Correctly completed sample form submitted.

**Summary Comment**

The actions and evidence submitted have been reviewed. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 9 have been adequately addressed.

**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 service had a healthy eating policy in place. There was a weekly menu plan. Snacks and meals were provided to each care room by the onsite chefs, at regular intervals throughout the day. On the day one of inspection children were observed to eat pasta with sauce and cheese for their main meal of the day. On day two children were offered stew with mash potato for their main meal. Alternative options were available should a child have a dietary requirement or not like the food served on the day. Younger children had the opportunity to feed themselves, appropriate to the age and stage of their development. Children were also offered water with their meals. The older children had access to their drinking cups and bottles throughout the day. Adults were on hand to support and encourage the children throughout mealtimes and when cups or bottles needed to be refilled. Nappy changes were carried out routinely and when required outside of the routine. Changes were an opportunity for positive one on one interaction between the adult and the child. Younger children had their individual sleep needs met as children were observed to sleep at various intervals throughout the day. The older children's needs for sleep occurred during a scheduled rest period after their main meal of the day.

Children throughout the service had the opportunity to have a change of environment during the day and went outdoors both days the inspectors were present. Children who had siblings or other family members in the service had the opportunity to see each other and say hello whilst outdoors. Children’s choice was facilitated if they preferred to return to the care room and play indoors instead.

Care rooms throughout the service were observed to have a well-stocked range of play based materials, offering opportunity for imagination, stimulation, creativity and thinking, all with defined interest areas.

One care room had a small gym area, with a single person climbing apparatus, a child friendly gym bike, a balance beam and soft padding underfoot. Children were observed climbing and then jumping from the frame, giving the children the chance to explore risk in a safe and supervised environment.

Adults were observed to interact and have fun alongside the children. A teddy bears picnic occurred in one of the care rooms with the adults allowing children to introduce their teddy, and discuss where their teddy came from, one child advised their teddy was from the local shop, whilst another was a “wedding teddy” given to them when they were a pageboy and walked up the aisle.

### 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.
- Five-point safety harnesses were present in the seated tables used for the younger children. A large wooden footrest was placed beneath the table to support children as they sat.
- Medication was stored safely in locked boxes in each care room and was inaccessible to children.
- Adults had immediate access to a first aid kit in the outdoor area should it be required.

##### Infection Control:

- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap and paper towels available.
- Mattresses were observed to be waterproof and wipeable to prevent any risk of cross infection.
- Children's soothers were kept in individual boxes labelled with the child's name and stored in their individual care bag.
- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be ventilated using openable windows or mechanical ventilation where windows were not available. No malodours were present on either day of the inspection.
- Aprons and gloves were available to adults when changing of a child was required.

### 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 with cellular blankets should they require.
- 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 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

#### General Safety:

1. A wire in one care room was loose and hanging down within reach of the children, this could pose a risk of injury to a child. It is acknowledged the adult present attempted to secure it when requested by the inspector.
2. A wooden bench in the outdoor area was observed to be broken and posed a risk of causing injury to a child or adult. It is acknowledged it was removed when brought to the attention of the person in charge.

3. Adults were observed to use unlidged cups with hot drinks during the children's rest period posing a risk of scalding to a child or adult.
4. There was no evidence of room temperatures being recorded in care rooms throughout the day. The air conditioning monitor did not accurately reflect the room temperature at child level. Temperatures were brought below 22°C once brought to staffs' attention by the inspectors.
5. Locks were not present on cupboards containing cleaning items which were within reach of children. It is acknowledged that loose ties were applied to the doors to mitigate the risk to children, however this was not sufficient to ensure the doors were secured and the cleaning materials could still be accessed by children.

### **Infection Control:**

6. In one care room the following was observed and could pose a risk of infection control.
  - a. Handwashing prior to eating and returning from the outdoor area was inconsistent and not adequately supervised. Several children were observed to eat with their hands.
  - b. The floor was observed not to be swept or washed throughout the day. As a result, the floor was heavily soiled and unsafe. Children were observed to drop food and cutlery, pick the items up and resume eating.
  - c. Cleaning of tables prior to eating was inconsistent at times during the inspection.
7. In one care room at nappy changing time, the following was observed
  - a. Children's hands were not washed after nappy changes.
  - b. Adults did not wash their hands between nappy changes.
  - c. The disposable paper roll on which the children were changed was not disposed of between changes, nor was the changing mat cleaned after each nappy change. This posed a risk of cross contamination.
8. A large pink support cushion in the junior nursery room was heavily soiled and required cleaning.

### **Fire Safety:**

9. Records pertaining to a staff roster was held for adults working directly with children, within the service. However, the roster did not record auxiliary staff who were also present on the day of inspection.

### **Action submitted by the Registered Provider**

### **Corrective & Preventive Action**

### General Safety:

1. Staff were made aware of this observation and reminded about the purpose of our service's daily opening checklist, which is to control for this risk. Regular ad hoc inspections by management in rooms will enable all staff to bring to their attention the need for continuous checks to ensure that wires that may fall within reach of children are controlled throughout the day.
2. This was addressed immediately and communicated to staff. The weekly maintenance checklist was updated to control for this non-compliance in future.
3. This brought to staff member's attention. The person in charge purchased lidded insulated cups for staff and removed all staff cups from rooms. Staff were informed of this new measure and invited to bring in their own lidded cup if they preferred a different style. By removing all open cups in all rooms our service has controlled for this non-compliance.
4. A similar thermometer used by the inspector was purchased and staff were instructed on how to use this. Staff will be notified of the discrepancy between the air temperature controller reading and the actual temperature reading of the room using the new apparatus.
5. A plan was made by the person in charge and the registered provider following the inspection to address this moving forward and staff were informed. Our service fixed all low-lying cupboard door locks. It was decided that a high wall cupboard would be installed in each room to control for the risk of this non-compliance in future. Storing all cleaning materials in high shallow wall cabinets will control for the above non-compliance in future.

### Infection Control:

6. Post-Inspection discussion was shared with staff immediately following the meeting. It was also discussed that for best practice a photo of a completely clean room should be displayed to ensure that relief cover staff know how to clean and tidy a room during the day. Posters were purchased and displayed which will remind staff of all times that children and staff would wash their hands. Regular ad hoc inspections daily by management will ensure that correct attention is brought to staff about these practices in rooms.
7. Post-Inspection discussion was shared with staff. Our service's nappy changing and hand washing procedure was revisited to highlight the importance of best practice. Nappy Changing visual posters were purchased and displayed. When to Wash Hands, poster was generated and displayed which clearly shows the steps required to ensure best practice. Ad hoc daily inspections by management ensure that staff failing to adhere to these practices will be quickly identified and supported in best practice performance.

8. This was removed immediately and during the subsequent staff meeting solutions were gathered. The weekly maintenance checklist was updated to ensure that covers were regularly checked. The person in charge also purchased a large number of replacements covers to allow soiled covers to be washed and dried before being reused.

**Fire Safety:**

9. This was brought to the attention of staff following the meeting. Solutions were sought from the staff team, and it was decided that ancillary staff would input their names on the daily register showing their time in and out. This would be employed by ancillary staff moving between rooms throughout their relief cover day. Any new relief cover staff will be instructed of this procedure during their staff induction.

**Supporting documentation submitted**

**General Safety:**

1. Scan of documentation submitted.
2. Scan of documentation submitted.
3. Photographic evidence submitted.
4. Photographic evidence submitted.
5. Photographic evidence submitted.

**Infection Control:**

6. Scan of documentation and photographic evidence submitted.
7. Scan of documentation submitted.
8. Scan of documentation and photographic evidence submitted

**Fire Safety:**

9. Scan of required documentation submitted.

**Summary Comment**

The actions and evidence submitted have been reviewed. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

**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 up until 27<sup>th</sup> March 2026.