

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL068
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Name of Service:	Little Learners Montessori (Glenties)
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Address of Service:	Church Road, Glenties, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F94R28R
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Name of Registered Provider:	Shirley Walsh
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	07/11/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	14	PM	5
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
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Inspection undertaken by:	L McGlynn
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable
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Description of service

Little learners Montessori is a privately owned and operated preschool service located on the outskirts of the rural town of Glenties, Co. Donegal. The service is registered to provide both sessional and part time care for children aged 2 to 6 years and operates between the hours of 9.00am and 2.00pm each weekday. The sessional service operates from 9.00am to 12.00md.

The service operates from a unit within a multipurpose commercial premises. There is one playroom with sanitary accommodation adjacent. Children have daily access to an on-site outdoor play area.

Staffing

There were three adults employed to work in the service which included the registered provider. Two of the adults were present on the day of inspection. One staff member is employed in an auxiliary capacity and does not provide direct care to 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/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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, 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 the named person in charge and a second person was available to deputise in her absence.
- (b) The registered provider confirmed that they, or the deputy person in charge were always on the premises when the service is operating.
- (c) There was a management structure in the service with the line of authority clearly identified.
- (2) The recruitment records in relation to all three staff members were reviewed on this inspection and the following was deemed to meet the requirements of the regulation.
 - (a) (b) There were two references on file from the most recent past employer or a source other than a past employer for two staff members.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the three staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(4) Evidence of completion of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications was available for two staff members.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a)(b) While it is acknowledged that there were two references on file for one staff member, neither of the references were from the person's most recent past employer as required. There was also no validation on either reference.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) (b) A reference has been received from the previous employer and is kept on file. Management will make sure that all references are correct and are from last employer when a new staff member is starting.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentation was submitted to evidence compliance.

Summary Comment

The non-compliance identified under Regulation 9 (2) has 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) There was an adequate number of adults working with the children throughout the inspection. A review of records demonstrated that an adequate number of adults were employed to work with the children during the hours of operation.
- (2) On the morning of inspection, there were two adults caring for 14 children aged 2-4 years. In the afternoon, two adults cared for five children aged 2-4 years.

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

- (1) (a) Lunches and snacks for children were brought to the service from in line with the services healthy eating policy. Children were observed to sit together for a morning snack and a variety of healthy food items were in each child's lunchbox. Children remaining in the service on a part-time basis had enough food to eat a second snack in the afternoon when the sessional children had gone home. The children were afforded plenty of time to enjoy their lunch in a relaxed and unhurried environment. Lunchtime was observed to be a sociable occasion for the children who could sit and chat with their friends and be independent by unpacking their own lunches. Staff offered assistance whenever required and sat with the children or moved around, encouraging relaxed conversation.

There was ample space in both the care room and the outdoor area for children to move freely and be physically active. Time was given throughout the session for children to make choices and decisions about their play and move around the care room selecting play items.

The staff members were warm, caring and playful in their interactions with children, using soft and gentle tones, positive language and engaging with the children at their level. Staff were regularly heard signing to children encouraging their language development. Children were promptly comforted when upset and were observed to respond well to staff members caring interactions. Staff were observed to offer sensitive prompts and gentle reminders around toileting and hand hygiene. Many children attending the service were capable of using the toilets independently and this was facilitated through the close proximity of the sanitary accommodation to the pre-school room.

Children were encouraged to take turns and share resources with their peers. A timer was regularly used for items of particular interest to children. Children were encouraged to be mindful of their peers and minor behaviour instances were resolved positively by staff.

The learning environment featured a good range of developmentally appropriate toys, equipment and play materials suitable for the age range and number of children in attendance. The preschool room was a bright and colourful space which had been decorated to reflect the children's developing sense of identity and belonging through the display of a family tree, images of children identifying their cubby hole and coat hook. A range of individual artwork was also on display. There was plenty of clear floor space to enable the children to move around unhindered and appropriate furnishings of low-level tables and chairs were available to facilitate mealtimes and tabletop activities.

The play equipment had been arranged to create defined areas of interest that were set out in a manner that allowed free flow of children around the room as they engaged with activities of their choice. The interest areas were well-resourced with a variety of associated materials and equipment. These included some recycled and real-world objects to support the children in acting out imaginary situations and support their play-based learning.

Interest areas that promoted imaginary play in the room included a home corner, a construction area, doll and baby care items, transport toys, and a shop area. Children’s creative expression was supported with a well-resourced art area and a large range of puzzles, blocks, shape sorters and task-based Montessori equipment supported children’s cognitive development. Children’s language development was enhanced by the print rich wall displays relevant to each interest area and the selection of age-appropriate reading materials in a library area.

There was evidence of short- and medium-term planning within the room with topical season/holiday-based activities planned for the coming week and month.

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 was secured when the inspector arrived at the service and throughout the inspection. This prevented children from exiting the service unsupervised or unauthorised persons gaining entry. A bell system was in place alerting staff to the arrival of parents or visitors.
- The perimeter of the outdoor play area was secured with boundary fencing and a gate with a bolt lock mechanism.
- The toys and equipment available in the service were appropriate for the age group of children attending and there were no hazards identified in the preschool room.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to children, secured by a high-level locking mechanism and hazardous cleaning equipment was stored in a secure area.

Infection Control:

- The preschool room and sanitary accommodation were maintained in a clean, hygienic condition. There was evidence of routine cleaning taking place and records identified appropriate cleaning methods and frequency for both the play items and the general environment.

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were available at children's wash hand basins to promote effective handwashing.
- Foot pedal operated bins were available in the preschool room and sanitary accommodation for the effective disposal of waste items. Larger waste bins were stored in an area inaccessible to children.
- The preschool room was ventilated by way of openable windows and the main door was propped open while children played outdoors to allow a purge of fresh air in the room.
- Children's lunchboxes were stored in the refrigerator preventing the risk of perishable food items spoiling.

Safe Sleep:

- Stackable floor beds were available for children to sleep on if required and a range of soft mats and furnishings were available in the preschool room for children to rest on if desired during the day.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency exits in the room were clearly identifiable and free from obstruction.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for one staff member. However, the vetting disclosure were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
2. The following hazards were observed in the outdoor area which posed a risk of injury to a child
 - A rusted wheelbarrow.
 - A broken basketball stand.
 - A broken oven.
 - Loose wheels from a wheeled toy with metal spikes exposed.

Infection Control:

3. Children's soothers were not managed in a hygienic manner in the service. One child was observed with a soother in their mouth which fell on the floor and was put back in their mouth again. It is acknowledged that staff encouraged the child to remove the soother shortly after this and placed it in their schoolbag for the remainder of the session.
4. Children's hands were not always washed at appropriate intervals including before eating their afternoon snack and on return indoors from outdoor play. This poses a risk of cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting has been received and is kept on file. The service will keep reviewing Garda vetting on a regular basis for all staff to make sure that none expire before been renewed.
2. All items were removed and disposed off on the day of the inspection. The play area will be checked daily before the children enter for items that are broken, rusted or in a bad state.

Infection Control:

3. All children's soothers are now kept in a sterile box in their bag. The children's soothers are kept in the children's bags in a sterile box and are given to the children if they are upset.
4. We have spoken to the children about the importance of handwashing. They wash their hands before snack, after playing outside and if soiled. We have reviewed our handwashing policy. The children wash their hands after outdoor play, before snack and if soiled.

Supporting documentation submitted

Evidence of compliance was submitted with the CAPA response.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. 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

Documentary evidence was provided to evidence that the service was appropriately insured to care for up to 22 children attending a part time service. The expiry date on the insurance was 27 March 2025.