

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2015FL054 |
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| Name of Service: | Castlefield Montessori School |
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| Address of Service: | 59 Castlefield Woods, Clonsilla, Dublin 15, Co. Dublin |
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| Eircode: | D15 YH36 |
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| Name of Registered Provider: | Ellen Leahy |
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| Service type: | Sessional |
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| Date(s) of Inspection: | 12/10/2023 |
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| No of pre-school children: | AM | 22 | PM | 7 |
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| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Early Years Inspectorate Floor 7 Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St. John's Road West, Kilmainham, Dublin 8 D08 X01F |
| Inspection undertaken by: | E. Griffin |
| 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.

Description of service

Castlefield Montessori School is a sessional service located in a residential area in Dublin. This preschool service caters for up to twenty-eight children aged between 2-6 years old. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and operates two sessions; a morning session from 9am to 12pm and an afternoon session from 12.45pm to 15.45pm from Monday to Friday. The service operates from a two-story house which has been converted solely for the use of a preschool facility. On the ground floor there is one large Montessori room which caters for up to twenty-two children. There is an adjoining kitchen/office and across the hallway there are two sanitary accommodations. On the first floor there is the toddler room which caters for up to six children 2-3 years and operates from 9.15am to 12.15pm from Monday to Friday. There is a sensory room next to the toddler room and across the hallway there is sanitary accommodation with a nappy changing facility.

Staffing

A total of four staff are employed in the service including the registered provider who works directly with the children. On the day of inspection there were three staff present throughout the day including the registered provider.

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 an examination of compliance under Regulation 9-Management and Recruitment, Regulation 11-Staffing Levels, Regulation 19-Health, Welfare and Development of Child, Regulation 23-Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child., Regulation 25-First Aid, Regulation 26-Fire Safety, and Regulation 28-Insurance. However, on inspection an additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 29 Premises. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under; Regulation 19 and Regulation 23. The scope of the inspection included the Montessori room and the Sensory room.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness, and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Additional Information

12 October 2023

An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the service within Regulation 23- The Sensory room temperature was above the required 18 to 22°C.

A response which outlined the action taken by the registered provider to address the concern was received on the 13 October 2023. Please see details in the body of the report.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, deputy person in charge, staff member 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.*

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 service had a named person in charge and a deputy person to deputise as required. Both the person in charge and the deputy person in charge were on the premises when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained in the service for the duration of the inspection.

(b) A review of the staff roster and discussion with management showed that the person in charge and the deputy person in charge are rostered to be present on the premises at all times.

(c) All staff working in the service were aware of the management structure in the service, the lines of authority and accountability and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(2) All four staff files including the registered provider were reviewed on the day of the inspection.

(a) There were three validated written references available from recent past employers.

(b) There were five validated written references available from a source other than a past employer.

(c) Garda vetting was available in respect of all four staff members.

(d) Police vetting was available in respect of the two staff who had lived outside the jurisdiction for longer than six months as an adult.

(3) On review of the four staff files, documentation showed that the procedures specified in paragraph (2) were conducted prior to staff being appointed.

(4) Evidence was available to show that the registered provider and the three adults who work directly with the children held 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.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

(1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(3) The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained on the day of inspection. The following ratios were observed:

- The Montessori Room, there were seventeen children aged between 3 to 4 years old being cared for by two adults at 9.34am in the morning. There were seven children aged between 3-4 years old being cared for by two adults at 1.05pm in the afternoon.
- The Toddler Room, there were five children aged between 2 to 3 years old being cared for by one adult at 9.45am in the morning. There was no afternoon session in this room.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) There was not an adequate number of staff working directly with the children on the day of inspection. Evidenced by the following observations:

- During 10.45am-10.55am one staff member was observed to leave the Montessori room to go to help the other staff member in the toddler room for nappy changing time. During this time, there was one staff member with seventeen children. This was during snack time where it was observed by the inspector that some of the children required extra support and supervision.
- The children in the toddler room did not get to go outside during the morning session on the day of the inspection. The staff member confirmed that the children usually get to play outdoors but there was no staff member available to assist the children go down the stairs on the day of the inspection due to a staff member being on leave.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) The registered provider has confirmed that the reason for the low staff numbers on the day of inspection was due to a staff member calling in sick. The registered provider has stated they are trying to obtain someone who is qualified and can stand in in to cover if a staff member is out sick. The registered provided has stated that all children will go outside daily.

Summary Comment

The actions stated by the registered provider address the non-compliances identified. The regulatory requirement has now been met for Regulation 11 Staffing Levels.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic Needs:

- The service promoted healthy eating. On the day of the inspection, children were observed to eat healthy snacks from home. Staff reported how they shared information with parents/guardians in relation to the healthy food policy of the service.
- Children's own drinks were available within their reach throughout the session should they feel thirsty at any stage, and children were encouraged to take plenty of drinks.
- There was a 'Birthday Wall' with photographs of each child and the date they were born in the Montessori room. This helps build a sense of identity and belonging for children in the service.

- There was 'Friendship Chain' across the wall with each child's name inside a paper chain made by the children. Staff discussed how this activity fosters friendships and promoted positive social and emotional wellbeing.
- At 10am children in the Montessori room were invited to participate in indoor exercises. Staff discussed how this activity promotes children to join in group activities, builds teamwork and supports gross motor skills.

Supporting Relationships:

- At snack time the children were given time to finish their snacks. Children who finished earlier were guided towards the other end of the room for reading time while the children who had not finished sat at the table to finish their snack.
- A health promoting ethos was implemented in the service in relation to supporting the children's emotional wellbeing. There was a box of 'Emotion Ribbons' which included coloured ribbons representing each type of emotion. Additionally, there was an 'Emotion Poster' explaining the colours on the wall, which helps children describe how they feel. The adults discussed how the 'Emotion Ribbons' support children's understanding of their emotions and when children have mixed emotions, they can mix the coloured ribbons up to help express how they are feeling.
- Interactions between staff and children were observed to be respectful and kind. For example, one child's shoelace was undone the staff member checked first with the child to see if she wanted help before tying the child's shoelace.
- Transition between 'play time' and 'tidy up time' was recognised and supported by staff. For example, the staff member in the Montessori room gave children five more minutes to play before 'tidy up time.' Supporting transitions allows children to predict and cope with changes during the day.

Physical and Material Environment:

- The Montessori room was bright and welcoming with plenty of natural light in the setting. The room was well laid out with designated areas of interest to provide for distinct types of play and learning. There was a Practical Life Corner, Sensorial Area, Mathematics, Language Area, and Cultural Studies, keeping in line with the Montessori curriculum ethos. Each area was well equipped with equipment and materials that promoted fine motor skills, mathematical conceptual understanding, and language development.

For example, staff showed the inspector wooden cylinder equipment, which is used to promote children's pincer grip. Additionally, it is used to help support children's calculation of sizes through its concept of 'control of error.' Meaning only the correct size wooden cylinder fits in the correct hole size. The inspector observed a child washing a large shell in a basin. Staff explained how this activity can have a calming effect on children.

- Equipment and materials were visible and easily accessible enabling the children to independently access their choice of activity. Equipment available included a library, arts and craft area, various sorting, stacking, measuring, and connecting equipment, real life materials, jigsaws, and knob wooden puzzles. The play materials available were used to facilitate literacy and numeracy development, fine motor skills, and cognitive and language development.

Programme of Activities:

- The children were observed to be partners in the programme of activities, staff were observed asking them to choose what activity they would like to during Montessori work time.
- The staff member in the Montessori room showed the inspector the visual daily routine on the wall. This timetable had photographs of each of the activities during the day. Staff explained how this timetable helped children to become familiar with the daily routine. This was evidenced further when the children appeared to be familiar to sitting down on the ground in a circle for 'Circle Time' and reading a book before 'Going Home' time. Routines are important for this age group and help children to feel safe and secure in their environment.
- At going home time children got to bring home artwork activities to show their parents/guardians.
- In the Montessori room, children's language development was observed to be supported throughout the day with large group discussion, singing and storytelling.

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 entrance door leading into the premises was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The external outdoor play area was secure with surrounding walls and securely gated reducing the risk of unauthorised access. Children who were brought out to this area from indoors were observed to be supervised.
- Toys and equipment used by the children were observed to be well maintained and in a good state of repair.
- There were no flexes or cables observed that were accessible to the children.
- Cleaning agents and medication were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Each sanitary accommodation was equipped with soap, warm water, and hand drying facilities.
- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet.

Fire Safety:

- On the day of inspection, it was observed that all fire emergency exit doors were clear from obstruction. This helps ensure the safe effective evacuation of children and staff in the event of a fire.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

(1) Temperatures were not maintained within the recommended ambient room temperature of 18 to 22°C. An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the registered provider on 12 October 2023 in relation to the following.

- In the sensory room temperatures were recorded at 25.8°C and 28°C between 11.27am and 12pm while children were playing in this room during this period.

Infection Control:

- (2) The nappy changing mat in the upstairs nappy changing area was not in a good state of repair. It was ripped in two places which increases cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

- (1) The registered provider has stated that the windows were opened, blinds pulled down and a cooler has been put into the sensory room on 13 October 2023. Staff have been asked to follow the above procedures and to check the room temperature daily. Staff have been instructed to bring children to the other room which is cooler if the room temperature is not between 18 to 22°C.

Infection Control:

- (2) A new nappy changing mat has been purchased and the registered provider has stated the mat will be regularly checked for damage or wear.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- Email stating the above corrective actions have been implemented and staff briefed on the procedures to follow if the room is not between 18 to 22°C.

Infection Control:

- Receipt of new nappy changing mat.

Summary Comment

The actions stated by the registered provider address the non-compliances identified. The regulatory requirement has now been met for Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety, and Welfare of Child.

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 trained in First Aid Responder training was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school. Two adults held an up-to-date certificate in First Aid Responder Training.

(2)(a) and (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available and were safely stored in an easily accessible and 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.
- (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) Documentation was available to demonstrate that fire drills were practiced monthly. The last fire drills took place on 28 September 2023. Records showed that there was a fire drill for the children attending the session at 10.50am and at 1.40pm for the children attending the afternoon session.
- (b)The number, type and maintenance record of the firefighting equipment was up to date. Fire extinguishers were last serviced in April 2023.
- (4) A procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was on display in prominent positions at the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)(b) There was no documentation available to demonstrate when the smoke alarms were last serviced.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider has stated that the smoke alarms have now been serviced by a fire alarm company on the 24 October 2023. The registered provider has stated that it has been arranged for the fire alarm company to carry out yearly service checks including providing certification to confirm that the inspection have taken place.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Documentation from the fire alarm company evidencing that the smoke alarms were serviced on 24 October 2023.

Summary Comment

The actions stated by the registered provider address the non-compliances identified. The regulatory requirement has now been met for Regulation 26 Fire Safety.

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 the service was insured. The insurance certificate provided for review showed cover for the number of children the service can accommodate at one time and an expiry date 27 November 2023.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (b) safe and secure,*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

(b) The premises was observed to be safe and secure on the day of inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

(e) The premises was not equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities. On the day of the inspection staff stated the upstairs toilet is used for both adults working in the service and the children attending. Children and adults require separate sanitary facilities. The regulatory requirement is that there is one toilet and hand wash basin for every 11 children in attendance.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider has stated that the service had an engineer out to look at the problem. The engineer has proposed a solution which will rectify the issue. There is an ensuite off the toddler room upstairs. The engineer feels this room is big enough to put in an air lobby and a sliding door and add a toilet and wash basin. This room has an extractor fan in it already. The door can be locked from the inside to accommodate privacy. The registered provider has stated they will go ahead with the engineer's solution to rectify the non-compliance.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Written verification from the registered provider stating that the proposed work will go ahead soon.

Summary Comment

The non-compliance for Regulation 29(d) will remain outstanding until the work proposed has been completed.