

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL122
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Name of Service:	Little Scholars Montessori & Childcare Limited
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Address of Service:	Quickpenny Road, Lusk, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	K45 DY75
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Name of Registered Provider:	Fiona Gregan
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	30/09/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	10
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Taaffe and R. Phillips
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).

Conditions if applicable	Not Applicable
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Description of service

A sessional early years service commenced operating in this setting in 1996 which the registered provider acquired in August 2023, operating since as Little Scholars Montessori & Childcare Limited. This service is one of the registered provider's three early years services, all of which are located in north Co Dublin. The service is registered to operate from 8.00am to 3.00pm each weekday, accommodating a maximum of 15 pre-school children aged 2 – 6 years on a full day care basis or 19 pre-school children on a sessional basis. The service operates over 49 weeks, closing for 2 weeks from late July and for 1 week after Christmas each year. School aged children are not accommodated in the service. Little Scholars Montessori & Childcare Limited is conducted from a single storey premises adjoining a number of houses, all of which surround a central courtyard in the village of Lusk in north Co Dublin. The service is conducted from one care room with ancillary accommodation including sanitary facilities, a kitchen and store room provided. An outdoor play area is located to the side of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider employs an operations manager who works in this service on 2 days each week in addition to engaging in administrative duties off-site, a service manager who manages the registered provider's two early years services in Lusk, and a further 4 staff members who work in this service (one of whom is employed as a room leader and designated person in charge in the absence of the registered provider or managers, and one who is employed to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary, to work with a child with additional needs in a post which is funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme). The registered provider works directly with the children in the service when necessary.

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23, 24 and 25. However, on inspection an additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 8 – Notification of change in circumstances. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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

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

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

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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 registered provider failed to notify the Early Years Inspectorate of a change in circumstances in relation to the following as per the schedule 4 Form for Notification of Change in Circumstances:

- The operating hours of the service was at variance with the hours the service is registered to operate. The service is registered to operate from 8.00am to 3.00pm but is currently operating from 8.00am to 6.00pm.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions and preventive actions have been carried out:

Corrective Action

(1) Change of Circumstances (CIC) form was submitted and approved by the Inspectorate on 08/10/2024.

Preventive Action

(1) This was an administrative error. The service will be more aware going forward about changes in that require a CIC. The service will submit a CIC request and wait for approval before changes of this nature are implemented. Operations Manager and Owner agreed this action in the weekly meeting on 01/11/2024. Notes in meeting book.

Supporting documentation submitted

Image of email from the Inspectorate's Registration Office showing approval for service to operate between 8.00am – 6.00pm.

Summary Comment

The corrective action and evidence submitted by the registered provider has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance observed under Regulation 8(1) has been adequately addressed.

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

(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 had appointed a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) The room leader was present and in charge of the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced at 9.20am on the morning of the inspection. The operations manager arrived in the service within 10 minutes of the inspectors' arrival and remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection. The registered provider attended the closing meeting at the end of the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed, 9 in total, which were maintained for the registered provider, 6 staff members and 2 external contractors who deliver a movement and activity programme in the service on a scheduled basis.

(2)(a)(b) The following references were made available for inspection in respect of the 9 adults whose files were reviewed:

- Six adults had 2 written, validated references.
- One adult had 1 written, validated reference.
- One adult had 2 written references.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all 9 adults whose files were reviewed. The Garda vetting records demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for 2 adults who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) The registered provider and all 6 staff members held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b) The following was not in place in relation to staff references:

- There were no written and validated references available for inspection in relation to one staff member employed in the service.
- A second written, validated reference was not available in respect of 1 staff member.
- Two written references which were available for 1 staff member in the service were not validated.

(2)(d) International police vetting was not available for 2 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for longer than 6 months as adults, while a third staff member did not have international police vetting available for 1 of the 2 countries that they had resided in for longer than 6 months as an adult.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions, and preventive actions have been carried out:

Corrective Action

(2)(a)(b) All references are now accounted for and validated.

(d) Any staff who lived outside of Ireland over a period of 6 months have completed or began the process of having international vetting verified.

Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b) References will be validated before new staff start their role.

(d) Any new staff that requires international vetting will be required to have it completed and verified before commencement of employment.

Operations Manager and Owner agreed these actions in their weekly meeting on 01/11/2024. Notes in meeting book.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of the required validated references and international police vetting for the 3 relevant staff members were submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective action and evidence submitted by the registered provider has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliances found on inspection 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 staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratio was observed when the highest number of children were present during the inspection:

- There were 18 children aged 2 years 8 months to 4 years 6 months being cared for by 3 and, at times, 4 staff members. One of these staff members was employed in a post funded by the Minister to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary, to support a child with additional needs as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

Fourteen of the 18 children were attending the service on a part-time or full day care basis on the day of the inspection.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, as evidenced in the staff roster and staff attendance records maintained in the service.

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) The following are examples of how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs of the Children:

- The staff members were observed engaging warmly and respectfully with the children throughout the inspection, responding to the children in an interested and engaged manner. The staff members ensured children's needs were met in a timely manner and were observed regularly updating each other on the needs and preferences of children in their care.
- Children brought their own healthy packed lunches and drinks from home to the service, in keeping with the service's healthy eating policy. Dinners were sourced in bulk from an external food supplier and stored frozen on the premises in advance of use, with sweet and sour chicken and rice served for dinner on the day of inspection. The staff members sat and chatted with the children during snack time and dinner time, encouraging conversation and extending interactions in a sociable manner. The children were provided with water to drink at snack time and dinner time.
- All children were toilet trained and the staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with prompting, discreet supervision and assistance provided by the adults when required.
- No child was observed sleeping during the inspection. The inspectors were informed that children who showed signs of tiredness or needed sleep were facilitated to sleep on sleep mats set up in the care room if required during the afternoon. During the inspection children were observed taking a break from activities, resting and relaxing on the child-sized couch, floor mat and cushions provided at the library area.
- The staff members were observed displaying anticipation and positive responsiveness when children experienced challenges in the environment or chose to change or opt out of activities. An example of this was demonstrated when two children chose to opt out of circle time and they were positively facilitated to select a preferred alternative activity instead.
- Once the heavy rainy conditions which prevailed on the day of inspection cleared in the afternoon, children were facilitated to play outdoors.

Supporting Relationships around Children

- The staff members were observed using welcoming facial expressions and warm vocal tones when engaging with the children. The staff members were observed affirming and offering meaningful praise and encouragement to the children for their efforts and involvement in activities. A key person system was in place and from conversation with staff members it was evident that they had a good understanding of each child's individual needs and preferences.
- Child-led play was facilitated during the inspection as evidenced by children playing in different areas of interest and by being involved in various activities, including when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service. The staff members were observed following the children's lead and engaging in play and activities with the children at an individual, small group and large group level.
- Children's language development was supported through one to one interactions, group discussions, action and movement songs, and storytelling which were observed during the course of the inspection.
- The inspectors observed that children's transitions were well supported with verbal strategies including tidy-up-themed songs and timers used by the staff members to inform and prepare children for upcoming activities and movement.
- Parents were provided with the opportunity to exchange information about their children informally with the staff members at drop off and collection times. Additionally, the service regularly shared relevant information electronically with the parents in relation to activities, the learning themes being implemented, and updates regarding their child's progress on a software application programme (an App).

Physical and material environment:

- The care room was set up in clearly defined interest areas which were equipped with a suitable range of developmentally appropriate play materials to support children's play and learning. The interest areas included a home corner containing a wooden kitchen equipped with real world packaging, utensils and appliances and baby care items; an arts and crafts area; a construction area; and a library area. A broad range of specialist Montessori equipment was also provided and freely accessible to the children in the service. Play equipment to support the development of the children's fine motor skills were provided including jigsaws, wooden and plastic bricks, magnets, interlocking toys, stacking toys, threading equipment and peg boards.

- The library area contained a plentiful number of books to support the children’s language development and provide choice for storytelling.
- Sensorial play was facilitated. For example, children engaged in an activity using playdough during the inspection and sand play was facilitated in the outdoor area.
- Family photographs were on display in the service which supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service and enabled the children to maintain links and bridge the gap between the service and home. The service fostered a sense of belonging in the local community as evidenced in the photographs of the local primary school, playground, train station and GAA club on display.
- The service’s outdoor play area was fully enclosed by fencing and boundary walls, with the front section paved and uncovered while the spacious area to the back was covered with plastic corrugated sheeting and surfaced in artificial grass. A range of equipment including a climbing frame with standing platform and slide attached, ride-on toys, a wooden-framed sandpit, a plastic playhouse, a tray-top activity table, wall-mounted guttering, balls and skittles were provided to support the children to play outdoors.

Non-Compliance Information

1. The children’s water bottles were not freely available to the children at all times throughout the day as, apart from snack times and mealtimes, they were stored in the fridge in the kitchen area. This prevented the children from taking a drink spontaneously without the assistance of a staff member, if they were thirsty outside of mealtimes.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions, and preventive actions have been carried out:

Corrective Action

Water hydration station has been set up.

Preventive Action

Staff have been reminded to adhere to the service’s Healthy Eating Policy, which states water must be available and easily accessed, at all times, to children in the service. Staff have been asked to remind the children daily to take their water from their bags and put them in the hydration station until this is routine. Staff are then to check regularly the correct number of bottles are out and remind the children who may have forgotten. Staff also will encourage children to use the station regularly.

Owner and Operations Manager spoke to the staff after the inspection on 30/09/24 regarding this action. Notes in staff communications book.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of the service's Healthy Eating Policy was submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective action and evidence submitted by the registered provider has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance observed under Regulation 19(1)(a) has been adequately addressed.

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

The following are examples of the measures undertaken by the registered provider and staff members to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the children attending the service:

General Safety:

- The entrance doors were appropriately secured which prevented children from exiting the premises unsupervised and prevented unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- Fencing was in place which provided a secure walkway from the entrance door to the outdoor play area, along the perimeter of the courtyard where cars parked. This reduced the risk of children or adults walking across the pathway of moving cars in the courtyard when arriving to and departing from the service and when accessing the outdoor play area.
- The warm water temperature in the sanitary accommodation did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C which reduced the risk of scalding for the children.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely on high shelving out of reach of children.
- A safety gate was in place making the kitchen inaccessible to children during the inspection. This reduced the risk of children gaining access to items that would pose a risk to the children's safety including the cooker, kettle, cutlery and sharp utensils.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels were provided for handwashing in the sanitary accommodation.
- The children were encouraged and gently reminded by the staff members to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet and after messy play, with assistance provided by the adults when necessary.
- Tables were observed to be appropriately cleaned before and following meals and snacks.
- The children's snacks provided from home were refrigerated on arrival to the service which reduced the risk of bacteria multiplying in the meat and dairy produce provided.
- Up to date documented cleaning schedules were on display in the service.
- The outdoor sand pit was fitted with a secure lid to prevent contamination by animals and birds.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No child was observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- In discussion with the inspector, staff members described safe sleep practices including the requirement to conduct and record sleep checks at 10 minutes intervals, noting the child's position, colour and breathing pattern, should a child sleep in the service during the day.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency exits were clear and unobstructed.
- The inspectors were informed and the records indicated that fire drills were practiced on a monthly basis to familiarise both adults and children of the correct procedures to follow in the event of a fire.

Outings:

- The registered provider stated that the service did not conduct outings.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. A child was observed eating popcorn which had been provided from home for their morning snack. Popcorn provided to children under the age of 5 years old is deemed a choking hazard.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions and preventive actions have been carried out:

Corrective Action

A gentle reminder message went out to all parents via the service's communication App stating that no popcorn is allowed and reminder to check the service's Healthy Eating Policy.

Owner and Operations Manager spoke to the staff after the inspection on 30/09/24 regarding this action. Notes in staff communications book.

Preventive Action

Reminded staff to adhere to the service's Healthy Eating Policy and staff have been informed to check snacks daily.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of message sent to parents.

Copy of service's Healthy Eating Policy.

Summary Comment

The corrective action and evidence submitted by the registered provider has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance observed under Regulation 23 has been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) The service maintained accurate details of all children in attendance during the inspection. The children were electronically entered as present on the mobile tablet device used to record attendance, noting each child's arrival and departure times. These details were also subsequently recorded separately in written format during the day.

(3)(a)(b) A system was in place to ensure that no person other than the children and their parents or guardians, employees, approved students or authorised visitors could enter the service. The inspectors were requested to record their attendance on the premises and the purpose of the visit.

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 registered provider and 2 staff members held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training. The service roster demonstrated that a person with FAR training was scheduled to be present and available to the children attending the service at all times when the service was operating.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid box was suitably equipped and easily accessible to the staff and available at all times for the children attending the service.