

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015GY103
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Name of Service:	Headstart Montessori School
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Address of Service:	22A Dun Esker, Poolboy, Ballinasloe, Co. Galway.
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Eircode:	H53 VW32
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Name of Registered Provider:	Fiona Carroll
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	14/06/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	12
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	TUSLA - Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality Assurance Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	H. Heagney
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
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Description of service

This pre-school operates two playrooms on the ground floor of a semi-detached house, in a housing development in the outskirts of Ballinasloe, Co. Galway. The indoor playrooms are named the 'Montessori room' and the 'Den'. This privately operated service caters for a maximum of 32 children, at any one time. The service offers a part time service from 9.00hrs to 14.00hrs, from Monday to Friday. Morning 9.00hrs to 12.00hrs and afternoon 12.15hrs to 15.15hrs, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sessional care pre-school programmes are also offered. The pre-school caters for children aged between 2 to 6 years of age. Quiet rest areas are provided in each of the pre-school rooms to facilitate a child to rest or opt out of an activity if he or she chooses. There are secure outdoor play areas to the rear of the premises for children to have fresh air and a range of play experiences.

Staffing

The registered provider and three staff work in the premises, directly with the children. All staff including the registered provider, hold a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) at a Level 5 or over, in Early Childhood Care and Education. The staff have documentary evidence of on-going training and education.

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 and 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 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.

(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) There was a designated person in charge and there was a named person available to deputize in the service.
- (b) The person in charge was on the premises when the early years inspector arrived and remained on site for the duration of the inspection.
- Documentary evidence indicated that either the designated person in charge or deputy were available, on the premises, when the pre-school children were present.
- The registered provider and three staff files were reviewed.
- (2)(a)&(b) Eight of the eight validated written references on file in respect of the registered provider and the three staff, were from a past employer, or a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the registered provider and three staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Documentary evidence indicated that one of the staff had lived outside the jurisdiction, for longer than 6 consecutive months, while over the age of 18 years, and had the required police vetting.
- (4) The registered provider and the three staff working directly with the children had evidence of Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) Level 5 to Level 8, in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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.*
- (8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-*
- (a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.*

Compliance Information

- (1) At all times during the period of the inspection, the person in charge ensured that an adequate number of staff were working directly with the children.

- (2) Documentary evidence in the form of attendance records and staff rosters indicated that adult child ratios were adhered to. On the morning of the inspection, there were nineteen pre-school children attending the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sessional care pre-school programme. All children were aged between 2 to 5 years. There were three staff directly caring for these children. Six of these children attended the part time care programme until 14.00hrs and were cared for by one staff member.
- In the afternoon of the inspection, there were six pre-school children attending the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sessional care pre-school programme, being directly cared for by two staff members.
- (8)(a) The registered provider ensured that there were two staff on the premises at all times while the pre-school was operating.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service.

(5) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child attends the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)&(i)

A sample of twelve children's records were reviewed by the early year's inspector.

The twelve records reviewed showed that the entries were factual, consistent, and accurate.

The children's records contained the following:-

- The name and date of birth of the child.
- The date in which the child first commenced in the service.
- The date on which the child stopped attending the service (where relevant).
- The name and address of the child's parent or guardian, and a telephone number where that parent or guardian (or a relative or friend of the parent or child) can be contacted during the hours of operation.
- Written authorisation / permissions for collecting the child.
- Details were recorded of any illness, allergy, or additional need(s) the child had, together with all the information relevant to the provision of specific care or attention.
- The name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner.
- A record of any immunisations the child has had or if applicable a disclaimer.
- Written parental or guardian consent was included to allow the child to have appropriate medical treatment if there was an emergency.

(4)&(5) The person in charge advised and documentary evidence from file review indicated, that all relevant children's records were kept for 2 years from the date a child stops attending 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.

Compliance Information

- The staff responded to children's individual personalities, sensitivities and needs in relation to toileting.

The children had unrestricted access to the toilet and did not have to wait to use the toilet. Children were allowed to take their time during toileting. Staff encouraged and supported children to become more independent in toileting practices.

During the afternoon Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sessional care programme, one child wore a nappy. There was a designated nappy changing area, with disposal aprons and gloves. Staff advised that the child's privacy and dignity was maintained while having a nappy change. There was no nappy change required on the day of inspection.

- Children were encouraged and supported to manage their own personal care appropriate to their own level of independence, and to develop self-help and personal hygiene skills. Staff guided and supported children who need more help.
- The service supported the children in forming and sustaining positive relationships with staff.

For example, by:

- assigning a key person to each child;
- showing respect for each unique child and developing their trust;
- being actively involved in children's play, where appropriate (initiating games, joining in when invited to by children);
- behaving in a way that creates a positive atmosphere (having frequent social conversations, joint laughter and showing affection);
- listening to the voice of the child as they communicate their needs, thoughts, and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children's cues, gestures, and body language;
- encouraging children to think critically, ask questions and respond to them in a way that promotes sustained shared thinking; nurturing and comforting children;
- using soft tones, the child's individual name, and getting down to their level and making eye contact.
- The staff supported children in developing their interactions and friendships with other children, especially those who had additional needs, or were learning English as an additional language. Staff advised of their multicultural events to support the inclusion of children from fourteen different cultures.
- The staff provided opportunities for small and large group activities and play, leading to increased social awareness, co-operation, collaboration, teamwork, and a sense of belonging.
- Visual aids (picture and word reminders) and instructions were displayed and used with the children to support their learning.
- The atmosphere in the learning environment was encouraging and unhurried.

- Children had opportunities to move about freely and explore their environment, both indoors and outdoors.
- The design, organisation and resourcing of the environment supported each child’s wellbeing, learning and development, within the ethos and philosophy of the service. The environment was comfortable, inviting and laid out to accommodate the needs of all children and staff in the setting. The environment provided a range of challenging, diverse, creative, and enriching experiences for all children in line with their stage of development.
- Staff encouraged children to interact and to engage with a range of materials, activities, equipment in the indoor and outdoor environment, based on the child’s needs, choices, interests and age and stage of development. The service provided an environment that was visually pleasing, allowing the children to think for themselves, and extends learning. Materials and equipment were arranged so they are visible and readily accessible to promote independent access by children. There were different interest areas provided, where equipment and materials of similar use are arranged or grouped together.
- There were soft seating quiet rest areas in each playroom and in the outdoor area. There were sleep mats available to provide an opportunity for a child attending the part time service to sleep or rest. On the day on inspection, no child required sleep provision.
- The equipment and materials in the outdoor play area supported children’s play, movement, and exploration, and provided opportunities exclusive to the outdoors. There was an all-weather sheltered area with a large sand unit, house / mud kitchen area and a parking area for the transport vehicles.
- The outdoor environment provided children with activities and opportunities for
 - fresh air, discovery, relaxing (e.g., soft seating, tyres, making ice cream in the mud kitchen, playing in the large sand area, and making a large pretend television with links),
 - releasing energy (e.g., playing chase, riding bicycles),
 - physical exercise and play (e.g., jumping, running),
 - exploring, engaging, and experimenting with nature (e.g., bugs, insects, and planting areas),
 - feelings associated with taking risks, learning about risk, and learning from risk, and challenging their own capabilities within safe limits (e.g., climbing, stacking).
- The staff ensured children had access to a variety of clothing for example, waterproof coats and trousers, and appropriate wellingtons and footwear for outdoor play.
- The children were supported to be confident about their identity and to have a strong sense of belonging each day while in the service.

- Staff encouraged children to interact and to engage with a range of materials, activities, equipment in the outdoor environment, based on the child's needs, choices, interests and age and stage of development.
- Children engaged in playing house, kitchen, matching, connecting, at construction, stacking, building magnets and at puzzle making. The children enjoyed tabletop exercises, counting, peek a boo, drawing, painting, play dough crafting. There was also circle and story time. The children enjoyed singing songs 'baby shark', 'good morning / good evening xxx is here today', 'three little sausages silling in the pan', 'ten little monkeys jumping on the bed' and 'if your happy and you know it clap your hands'. The children enjoyed doing exercises like jumping jacks, hopping, and running on the spot. The children celebrated and sang happy birthday to one child.
- The service respected and valued parents, guardians, and families of all diversities. Information provided to parents and guardians was available, easy to use and accessible for example on notice boards, via texting, via a social media messaging application, and by one-to-one contact with parents or guardians and by parent or guardian meetings.
- Staff communicated with parents and guardians in a sensitive, supportive, and confidential manner, while being open and honest. The staff worked with parents and guardians by sharing knowledge and observations of the child's interests, strengths, developmental and care needs, approaches to learning, changes in their life, and any other concerns. The staff provided parents and guardians with daily information, including significant events or activities involving their child.
- Playroom and individual child learning journals / profile scrapbook were available. The themes to date included mummies with babies in their bellies, family in Germany, Poland, Romania etc, exploring the world map, using the while board and magnetic shapes, family wall, seasons, animals, nature walk, creepy crawlies, circle time, culture day, art and craft work, roar like a dinosaur, rainbows, shapes, colours, threading, Montessori towers, rods and insets, healthy eating, super hero day, festivals and occasions. The theme of the week was summer, graduation preparation, summer fun picnic, and our sports day.
- There were established links networks within the community for example the bicycle club, the ambulance paramedics and other community representatives, who visited the children and enhanced their learning.
- There were curriculum statements, and daily schedules on display.
- Staff adjusted the level of support provided to children depending on the child's abilities, allowing for children's partial participation and participation with support.
- The staff listened to children in a caring, gentle way when they expressed emotions, and reassured them that it is normal to experience positive and negative emotions at times. The staff acknowledged and

accepted children’s feelings (positive and negative) and the relationships between children’s actions and other’s responses. The staff supported children to enter social groups, and to learn to help and positively engage with other children. The staff encouraged and praised children for specific, positive, and appropriate behaviours. The children were given choice on what to do next.

- The programme of care was flexible and guided by the children’s choices. Children were supported by the staff during periods of individual and group-based activities, the staff sensitively supervised and intervened when necessary.
- The staff were observed helping children to find solutions, supporting them, and talking to the children in a variety of ways, discussing, questioning, modelling, and commentating, extending a child’s activities and initiating games and activities. The staff provided significant opportunities for the child to decide their play activities and experiences.
- Staff used positive strategies to support children’s inclusion. For example, the inspector noted that the staff acknowledged a child’s engagement in an activity ‘that is great’ ‘well done’ and used open ended questions such as ‘what should we do next?’, ‘is there any other way to do this?’, to allow children to critically think and explore.
- Throughout the inspection, the voice of the child, their choices, interests and their age and stage of development were considered. The children were given positive alternatives, rather than just being told ‘no’. The children were supported in preventing, managing, and resolving conflict. Children could identify, name, and explore their feelings both positive and negative. The service used red and green choice behaviour board system. Green was the symbol for go, keep going while red was the symbol for stop. Staff advised that green and red choices focused on the child’s choice rather than the child. Staff advised that a child often changed his/ her behaviour, by making a green choice.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious, and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

- The service had a healthy eating policy.

- The children had their snack of fruit pieces, cheese, meat slices, yogurt, crackers, wraps, and sandwiches, provided by parents and guardians.
- The six children attending the part time service had a second snack meal at 13.15hrs, provided by parents and guardians. The staff member toasted bread and where applicable heated food.
- Each child was given enough time to eat and enjoy their snacks and meal without being rushed. The atmosphere during snack / mealtime was relaxed, with pleasant social interaction among the children and staff.
- Children’s drinks were available to allow the children the opportunity to ‘self-serve’.
- The crockery, cutlery and drinking utensils used were suitable for the children’s ages and stage of development.
- The service provided furniture and utensils that are age appropriate and developmentally suitable to encourage each child to be involved in and enjoy his or her snack / mealtimes.
- Perishable items from children’s lunch boxes were stored in a fridge in each playroom.

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 staff working in the service has a clear understanding of their own role and range of responsibilities in the service to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the children attending the service.
- The entry to the premises and the staff only areas – the hall, storage areas, kitchen and adult sanitary area were secure and thereby inaccessible to a pre-school child.
- The external outdoor play area was secure so that children could not leave the area unsupervised and unauthorised persons could not enter the area.
- There were no identifiable hazards.
- Blind cords were secured by fasteners.
- Cleaning and sanitising materials were inaccessible to children.

- Children were seated at tables that were between waist and mid-chest level and allowed the seated child's feet to rest on a firm surface.
- Equipment was used according to manufacturers' instructions and was appropriate to the age and stage of development of the child. One child had a wheelchair and had easy access to the facilities and equipment.
- Large pieces of furniture and equipment had stable bases and are securely anchored. Equipment, materials, and furnishings were sturdy and safe. Surfaces were even.
- Shock absorbing surfaces were installed in potential fall zones in the outdoor area. Walkways and walking surfaces were nonslip, free of water and loose materials.
- Ride on toys were capable of steering, suitable for the child, had a low centre of gravity and were in a good condition.
- The sand area was free of toxic or harmful materials and the large sandbox was covered when not in use.
- There were clearly identifiable drop off and collection points and a purpose built all weathered sheltered area to the front of the premises.

Infection Control:

- Hand washing facilities were provided with a supply of warm water, liquid hand soap and disposal paper towels. There were three wash hand basins in the children's sanitary areas. There were wash hand basins in each playroom.
- Children were observed washing their hands after toileting, after messy play, after outdoor play and prior to their snacks / meals.
- Tabletops and work surfaces were cleaned with disposal paper towels and disinfectant spray.
- The playrooms were kept adequately ventilated with the doors left open whilst maintaining the room temperatures at the required levels.
- Adequate supplies of disposable tissues were readily available in each of the playrooms.
- The service had cleaning templates and schedules.