

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015GY231
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Name of Service:	Smarties Montessori School
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Address of Service:	Raheen, Athenry, Co. Galway
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Eircode:	H65 WC99
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Name of Registered Provider:	Joanne Melia
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	17/06/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	23	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Year's Inspectorate, TUSLA, Child and Family Agency, 2nd Floor, St. Mary's HQ., Castlebar, Co. Mayo
Inspection undertaken by:	B Lavin
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

Smarties Montessori school is a privately operated pre-school in a detached premises in the outskirts of Athenry, county Galway. This is a sessional early years' service which provides a morning session from 09.00-12:00 five days per week for children aged from two to six years throughout the academic year. The service caters for a maximum number of 40 pre-school children, at any one time. There are two playrooms namely Room 1 and Room 2. There is also a kitchenette/office. There are secure outdoor play areas to the front and side of the premises for children.

Staffing

The service employs three staff including the registered provider who works directly with the 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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15- Record of a preschool child.

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.

(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 designated person in charge in the service and a named person was available to deputise as required.

(b) The registered provider was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

(2)

The records of the three adults employed in the service were reviewed.

(a) Five of the required six written and verified past employer references were available.

(b) One of the required six references was from a reputable source in the absence of a past employer.

(c) A Garda vetting disclosure was available for the three adults in the service. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for the three the adults.

(d) International police vetting documents were available on file for 1 adult who lived outside of the state for a period of longer than 6 months when over the age of 18 years.

(4)

Evidence of Level 5 to Level 7 qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent was available on file for the three adults who worked directly with the children.

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

(1)

During the period of inspection there were adequate numbers of adults working with the pre-school children attending the service.

(3)

The registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children specified was maintained.

There were 23 children present on a sessional basis aged from 3 years to 5 years old with 3 staff members caring for the children.

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.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) (a) to (i)

The inspector reviewed a random sample of 10 children's records. The records contained the required details as laid out under the regulation.

(3) (c)

The required information was made readily available for inspection in the service by the registered provider on request.

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

Basic needs

- During the inspection the children ate a snack which consisted of fruit, yogurt, crackers, ham, sandwiches, bread rolls and cheese provided by the parents/guardians, seated at low tables and chairs and supervised by the adults who gave assistance where it was needed and encouraged conversation with the children during mealtime. Perishable food items were stored in the service fridge.
- Each child was given enough time to eat and enjoy their snacks without being rushed. The atmosphere during snack time was relaxed, with pleasant social interaction among the children and staff.
- The children had unrestricted access to the toilets 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.
- The children enjoyed freedom of movement in the preschool room and outdoor area. They were able to explore several different interest areas while outdoors.
- In the playroom, the children had the opportunity to rest or relax with soft seating in the form of a child size couches.
- 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. Children were observed washing their hands before snack time.
- Children had plenty of opportunities to move around to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance and develop both gross motor and fine motor skills.

Supporting relationships

- The service supported the children in forming and sustaining positive relationships with staff. The staff talked to the children about upcoming changes to primary school and were very familiar with each child.

- The staff were actively involved in children’s play, where appropriate initiating games and joining in when invited to by children.
- The staff behaved in a way that created a positive atmosphere, having frequent social conversations, joint laughter and showing affection.
- The staff listened to the voice of the child as they communicated their needs, thoughts and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children’s cues, gestures and body language.
- Soft tones were used with the children, along with the child’s individual name, getting down to their level and making eye contact.
- The atmosphere in the learning environment was encouraging and unhurried.
- Staff communicated 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 at drop off and collection times, by phone and by text. End of year learning journals were provided for each child and showed activities in both photo and written descriptions of activities and learning throughout the year.
- The staff were observed helping children to find solutions, supporting them and talking to the children in a variety of ways- discussing, encouraging curiosity, expanding language skills, modelling and initiating games and activities.

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 ensured that a person trained in first aid was immediately available to the preschool children attending the service.

There were two adults employed in the service trained in First Aid Response with expiry dates of May 2026 and February 2027.

- (2)(a) There was a suitably equipped first aid box available and it was stored safely on a high shelf in the playroom. The first aid box had adequate supplies for the number of children attending.
- (b) The first aid box was available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

The service's insurance with an expiry date of 27/03/2026, was for a sessional service, for a maximum number of 35 children. The insurance covered the following,

- personal accident,
- insurance against fire and theft,
- buildings,
- outings undertaken as part of the service provision.
- public liability,