

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH002			
Name of Service:	Aladdin's Cave Montessori School and Crèche			
Address of Service:	Stoney Lane, Ardee, Co. Louth			
Eircode:	A92 WN26			
Name of Registered Provider:	Patricia Kerr			
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional			
Date of Inspection:	14/07/2025			
No of pre-school children:	AM	32	PM	31
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84			
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna, M Mc Donnell			
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			

Description of service

Aladdin's Cave Montessori & Crèche is a privately owned childcare service in operation since 1999. The service provides full day care, part time and sessional care to a maximum of 72 children pre-school children aged 0 to 6 years. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. There are five care rooms in the service namely, The Baby Room, The Toddler Room, Pre-school Rooms 1, 2 & 3. On the day of inspection, the Pre-School Room 1 was used by School Aged children only. Additional facilities include a kitchen, sanitary facilities (nappy changing areas), sleep room and outdoor play areas with adequate parking available to the front of the service. A school aged service is also provided.

Staffing

There are eighteen adults employed in the service including the registered provider, two managers and a cook.

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/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding

Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures, Regulation 28 Insurance and Regulation 29 Premises.

The scope of this inspection included the Baby Room, Toddler Room, and Preschool 2 & 3 Rooms.

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, manager, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Compliance Information

(1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge, and two named persons to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or a named person in charge were on the premises.

(c) A management structure was in place, which was clearly identifiable through review of the staff roster, a management structure on display and through discussion with the staff team.

(2) The files for 18 staff were reviewed.

(a) (b) Two written and validated references were on file for 18 adults.

A total of 23 written and validated references from a previous employer were on file.

A total of 13 written and validated references from a reputable source were on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 18 staff.

The registered provider did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) A review of the employment history for 18 staff, demonstrated that 3 adults had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. The required police vetting for the 3 staff was available on file.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that all 18 staff employed to work within the service, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, 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.

(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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at maximum attendance

Two adults cared for 9 children aged 1 year 8 months to 2 years 3 months in the Baby Room, of whom 8 attended on a part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 8 children aged 2 years 8 months to 3 years 6 months in the Toddler Room, all of whom attended on part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 8 children aged 4 years 4 months to 5 years 3 months in Preschool 2 room, all of whom attended on part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 7 children aged 3 years 6 months to 3 years 11 months in Preschool Room 3, all of whom attended on part time or full day care basis.

In addition to the above, one staff member was rostered to cover staff breaks and lunches across the care rooms, the service manager who was on cooking duties on the day of inspection and the registered provider also covered breaks in the care rooms when required.

(8) A review of the staff roster demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times.

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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

The service provides all snacks and meals to the children attending on a part time or full day care basis. The children also have an option to take in their own lunches who attend on a sessional basis. Snack and meal times were observed to be unrushed, with staff observed to sit with the children at these times. Younger babies were provided with additional supports where needed.

Nappy changing was carried out at scheduled times and also outside of these times where the needs of the children required it. Where children's clothing became soiled, it was observed to be changed in a timely manner. Staff were observed to engage in conversation with children during nappy changing times. The older children were encouraged to be independent while using the toilet, and staff appeared mindful of children that may require additional supports during these times.

Bibs were provided for snack and meals times for the younger children and aprons were available for messy play activities.

Supporting Relationships

The staff throughout the care rooms were observed to positively engage with the children within their care, and a warm and welcoming atmosphere was present in each room. The staff were observed to engage in conversations with the children and talk through what they would like to play with or do next, for example the children in the Toddler room were provided with the choice of playing indoor or outdoor with the door left open to facilitate a change of choice to the children.

The children appeared familiar with the staff who cared for them, and warm engaging conversations about the children's likes and home life was observed between children and staff.

Communication with parents is in person upon arrival and collection, which was observed in practise on the day of inspection. Communication notebooks for each child attending the Baby Room are completed and sent home daily to include the child's routine that day in the service.

Physical And Material Environment

The care rooms were bright and welcoming and were laid out with well-resourced designated play areas to include home corners, rest areas, book areas, floor play sections, table top areas and construction areas which facilitated meaningful play and learning experiences for the children in attendance.

The materials were easily accessible to the children on low level shelving. The children were observed to freely explore their play environment leading their own play choices, while closely supported by the staff.

Sensory play experiences to include cereals and playdough were available for the children, with sand trays provided in the outdoor areas. A soft floor area and ball pool was provided in the Baby room where children were observed to enjoy playing and relaxing.

Two enclosed outdoor areas located to the sides of the premises. One area located directly off the Toddler room, is designated to the Baby and Toddler rooms which was a covered area with soft fall ground surfacing. Ride on, rocker and push along toys, along with a sand tray, children’s benches, chalkboards and a slide was located in this area.

The second area used by the Preschool rooms had a covered area with soft fall ground surfacing. In this area there was a chalkboard, playhouse, covered water tray and slide. In the open area, there was a wooden boat, tyres and climbing equipment. Small balance steps, ride on toys and chalkboards with chalk were also available.

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 registered provider ensured all reasonable measures were put in place to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children attending such as:

General Safety:

- The premises were appropriately secured to prevent a child from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. The doors leading off the main entrance hall that led directly to the care rooms were secured by coded door locks.
- A visitor log was maintained, and the inspectors were requested to sign in upon arrival.
- The outdoor areas were observed to be secured by high level walls and fencing, with lockable gates.
- The toys and play equipment observed in use on the day of inspection was maintained in good repair
- Risk assessments were available for review and completed up to date.
- The kitchen and storage areas were inaccessible to the children.
- Windows fitted with restrictor devices and blind cords where present, were adequately secured.
- Floor coverings were presented in good condition.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of the reach of children.
- The children were observed to be adequately supervised by staff while in the indoor and outdoor environments.

The inspectors observed the following infection control measures in practice within the service:

Infection Control:

- Warm running water, liquid soap, disposable paper towels and foot operated bins were provided at each wash hand basin. Hand washing was observed in practise following outdoor play, and before snack and meal times.
- Sanitary areas were ventilated through means of trickle vents and openable roof windows.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned before and after meals.
- Snacks taken in from home by the children were stored in the fridges in the Pre-School rooms.
- Cleaning schedules were available for review and completed up to date. The service was maintained in a clean manner.
- Individual boxes were provided for the storage of children's soothers, with staff outlining correct procedures for the washing and sterilisation of soothers.
- Mouthed toy boxes were provided in the younger care rooms and observed in use on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- Sleep facilities provided were adequate for children aged under 2 years. Three small sleep rooms to include a total of 10 cots were available for children's use.
- Cellular blankets, with individual bed linen was provided for each child. Each cot was individually labelled and used solely for the named child.
- Sleep records available for review detailed each sleeping child's name, colour, breathing, position and staff signature at 10-minute intervals.
- The children in the Toddler Room, all of whom were aged 2 years and over on the day of inspection slept on stackable beds, with their own individual bedding. The children were observed to be supervised while sleeping.

Fire Safety:

- Fire drills were carried out monthly, demonstrated by records available for review. The staff outlined the location of the fire assembly point located to the front of the premises. Fire exits were observed to remain free from obstruction during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. In respect of 4 staff members, the service did not demonstrate compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years, as a period in excess of 3 years had lapsed since their Garda vetting disclosures were issued.

Infection Control:

2. Two nappy changing procedures were observed where the children were observed not to have their hands washed after the nappy changing procedure and before returning to their care room. This practise is not in line with the services nappy changing policy and poses a cross-contamination risk.
3. The nappy changing bin in the Toddler room had no lid present, staff advised that it was broken, which poses an infection control risk.
4. At morning snack time in the Toddler room, chopped fruit was served to the children directly on to the tabletops rather than on plates which was an unhygienic practice.

Safe Sleep:

5. In the Baby Room the following safe sleep risks were observed which was at variance with safe sleep practises and guidance:
 - Comforters were observed to remain in the cot with a sleeping child.
 - Sleep records reviewed on the day did not detail the room temperature while sleeping children were present. The services sleep policy outlines what temperature the room should be maintained at.
 - During the transition to bedtime in the Toddler room, one child was observed to be given a bottle of milk while being placed to sleep on a stackable floor bed.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. All 4 staff have filled out new Garda vetting forms and we have submitted them to Early Childhood Ireland. A list of Staff Vetting dates will be drawn up to identify when re-vetting is required, therefore preventing lapses.

Infection Control:

2. We have adapted our Nappy Changing Procedure to include the protocol for hand washing after nappy changes for under two's. We will ensure there is adequate staff available to assist with hand washing after nappy changes throughout the day for under two's.
3. A new pedal bin was bought for the Toddlers Room in the changing room. Staff will ensure to report any broken equipment to management and management will replace as promptly as possible.
4. Plates will always be provided to the children before fruit is served, and staff will be reminded of this daily practise. Staff will be reminded of the importance of using plates at mealtimes, staff spot checks will be carried out on a regular basis to ensure correct practise is taken place.

Safe Sleep:

- 5.
- We have adapted our Safe Sleep Policy to clearly state the procedure for allowing children to go to sleep with their comforters under the supervision of a staff member until asleep, when the item will be removed from the cot. Ensuring that on staff induction, staff are reading all policies and signing off on them, followed by regular room spot checks to ensure correct practise is being carried out.
 - We have amended our sleep logs to include room temperature checks on each child every 10 minute. Ensuring that all policies are updated regularly and changes are made where required.
 - We have again amended our Safe Sleep policy to include the procedure of children drinking their bottle on a staff members knee before being placed on their bed/ cot, all staff have been notified of this change. Ensuring there is a sufficient area, chair, couch available for adults to sit and allow children to drink their bottles in a safe manner.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Copies of 4 Garda vetting renewals.

Infection Control:

Copy of updated nappy changing policy, and staff sign off sheet declaring they have reviewed the policy.

Photograph of new pedal operated bin in place.

Safe Sleep:

Updated safe sleep policy, and staff sign off sheet declaring they have reviewed the policy.

Sleep room temperature logs in place.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23.

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

(2) (a) & (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available on the premises, located in the main hallway, and was available at all times.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) A person trained in first aid for children was not at all times immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. The one staff member who holds up to date FAR training was not rostered to work on the day of inspection. The certificates on file for four additional staff trained in FAR had expired. A further three staff had partly completed FAR training with the final part scheduled to be completed on Tuesday 15th July 2025.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

All 4 staff have completed their practical FAR training on the evening of the 15th of July and have been awarded their full certs.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of completed FAR training for 4 staff members.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has adequately addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 25.

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) A record of the fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded on Tuesday 24th June 2025.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated January 2025, and the smoke alarms was dated 14th April 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls throughout the service, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for up to 72 pre-school children attending the service on a full day care basis. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28th March 2025 to 27th March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

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

(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

(d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and

Compliance Information

(c) The service was adequately lit throughout; fluorescent lights were fitted with protective covers and natural light was provided through windows. The room temperature in the nappy changing areas and sleep rooms were maintained between 18°C to 22°C on the day of inspection. All windows within the care rooms were opened to provide consistent ventilation to the care rooms.