

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH103		
Name of Service:	Tír na nÓg Montessori Pre-School		
Address of Service:	Cluide, Drumcar Road, Dunleer, Co. Louth		
Eircode:	A92 EW65		
Name of Registered Provider:	Maria Mc Donald		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date(s) of Inspection:	02/05/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	21	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 180-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co Dublin K67 Y5C6.		
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Cully		
Title:	Early Years Inspector		
Authority to Inspect			
The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).			
Conditions if applicable	Not applicable		

Description of service

Tir na nÓg Montessori Preschool, established in 1999, is a privately operated early years service located in a rural area of Dunleer, Co. Louth. The service is operated from a premises adjoined to a private residence and consists of one care room, sanitary facilities, and a secure outdoor play area to the rear of the building. The service offers a Montessori preschool session between the hours of 9.00am – 12.30pm, Monday to Friday, 38 weeks of the year and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme.

Staffing

The registered provider works in the premises and works with the children on a daily basis. There are currently 3 additional staff members employed in the service to work directly with the children. Two posts are currently part funded by the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) scheme.

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 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, 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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived on the morning of the inspection and was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

On the day of inspection, a total of 4 staff files including the registered providers file were reviewed.

(2)(a) & (b) There were 2 written and validated references available for the 3 staff members and the registered provider whose files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 4 adults whose files were reviewed. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available as required for 1 adult who had lived outside the State as adults for more than 6 consecutive months.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to demonstrate that all 3 staff members and the registered provider who worked directly with the children in the preschool service 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.

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) There was an adequate number of staff working with the children on the day of the inspection.
- (3) The adult to child ratio was correct when the inspector arrived for an unannounced inspection and was appropriately maintained in the service throughout the inspection.
- There were 4 adults caring for 21 children aged 3 years 4 months to 4 years 9 months. Two staff members are employed to reduce the adult to child ratio to support children with additional needs, when necessary, as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

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 observations are examples on how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

Basic needs:

- On the inspector's arrival the children were enjoying time in the outdoor learning environment. The early years practitioners created a warm and friendly atmosphere and were supervising and interacting with the children.
- The service has implemented a rolling snack time where children can come to the snack table to eat in their own time. The service introduced this practice to reduce the number of transitions within the daily routine. On the day of the inspection the rolling snack time was being facilitated outdoors under a sheltered area. The early years practitioner explained that they aim to have snack time outdoors as much as possible, depending on the weather. The children appeared to be familiar with this style of snack time and were enjoying eating and chatting together.
- The early years practitioners were responsive in attending to children's personal care needs, assisting them to add or remove layers of clothing while playing outdoors, reminding them to use the toilet and wiping their noses or faces.
- Children's photographs, photographs of family and their artwork were displayed throughout the care room. Displaying children's photographs and artwork supports them to feel safe a sense of belonging in their learning environment.
- The early years practitioners are trained in curriculum programmes that support both emotional regulation and diversity. There was supporting documentation and resources in the care room that are used regularly with children to support their social and emotional well-being and development.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The children appeared to feel safe, comfortable, and familiar with the practitioners and within the environment. This was evident as children called the adults by name, invited them to play, approached them with ease and enjoyed being around them. The children navigated their learning environments freely in the knowledge that their choices and interests would be supported.
- The registered provider and the early years practitioners were observed to provide the children with sensitive and nurturing interactions throughout the inspection. They were knowledgeable about children's interests and needs and planned the daily routine in ways that would support children's meaningful engagement in the preschool experience. The children were spoken about positively and respectfully and their efforts were acknowledged with encouraging feedback.

- The service actively encourages and facilitates families to participate in the preschool experience. Monthly newsletters are sent by email to update families on current and upcoming events. A mobile application is used to document the children’s learning experiences, developmental observations, and group news. Parents have access to this app and can leave comments or feedback under their child’s stories and observations.

Physical and material environment:

- A variety of age-appropriate materials and resources were available to the children in the care room. The materials were organised by Montessori curriculum themes such as practical life, literacy and numeracy, sensorial and culture along with additional puzzles and games. There was a well-resourced home corner which included real life materials and packaging, cookbooks, dress up clothes and additional props to facilitate role-play and imaginative play. A role play area was also used for ‘Show and Tell’ and as a shop with supporting resources and equipment.
- The large and enclosed outdoor area also had identifiable interest areas which facilitated outdoor learning experiences. One section was covered in soft bark and contained a willow tunnel, a child-sized wooden car, a bridge, tree stumps, a sand pit, mud kitchen, digging area, a swing, a music frame and bench. Under a sheltered area there were large sensory trays where children were using nets to find toy insects in the natural and sensory material. A shed had been converted into another play where children had access to collection of books, a dolls house and small world table. An area which was part paved and had an area covered in impact absorbing surface allowed children space to move freely on bikes, scooters and ride-on toys. There were also playhouses, a ball pit, a seesaw and other equipment in storage. The third sheltered area facilitated outdoor snack time, but also tabletop activities and art activities. There is also ample provision of outdoor overalls and footwear available for the children.

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:

- External doors of the preschool service were appropriately secured to prevent an unauthorised person from gaining access to the children and prevent children from exiting the premises unsupervised.
- The premises, play materials and equipment provided in the care room and outdoor area were observed to be in a state of good repair.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Children's snacks, which were provided by parents, were stored appropriately in the fridge. Located in the care room.
- Thermostatically controlled running warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service. There was also a wash hand basin with soap and paper towels in the covered outdoor area.
- Cleaning and disinfection schedules and records were available and up to date. The services materials, equipment and facilities were in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- The fire exit was unobstructed.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) A person who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the service. This was evidenced in the FAR training records maintained for 1 staff member. It is also acknowledged that 3 staff members held in date paediatric first aid training.

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) Records were available in the service to demonstrate that regular fire drills take place. The most recent fire drill was recorded to have been carried out 24/04/24.

(b) There was a record available that detailed the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system was last checked and serviced by a registered professional on 24/08/23.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were on display in the care rooms and corridors of the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was available to demonstrate the preschool service was adequately insured. The service is currently insured to accommodate 22 sessional preschool children, with an expiry date 27/11/2024.