

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH199		
Name of Service:	The Willows Montessori		
Address of Service:	Castle Glen, Donacarney, Co. Meath		
Eircode:	A92 NX00		
Name of Registered Provider:	Vicki Mathews		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	18/10/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	31	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath		
Inspection undertaken by:	A M Cunningham		
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 privately owned sessional service was established in 2006 and is situated in a rural village setting. A service is provided to children aged between 2- 6 years and is open Monday to Friday from 09:30-13:00hrs with an extra half hour available to children if required for 38 weeks of the year. A school age service is also offered. Learning is facilitated through a play-based curriculum blended with the Montessori philosophy of learning. The pre-school is located in a purpose-built premises in a private residential housing estate close to Mornington Co. Meath. Three pre-school rooms, a kitchen and an office are provided. An outdoor play area is located to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

There were seven adults, including the service manager present on the day of inspection. The adults working directly with the children held qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or higher, as recognised on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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 announced 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.

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, 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.

(6A) Paragraph (4) shall not apply to an employee of a registered provider where - (a) the registered provider receives funding for the employment of the employee pursuant to a scheme funded by the Minister and known as the Access and Inclusion Model, and (b) the employment of the employee is for the purpose of providing support, pursuant to the scheme referred to in subparagraph (a), for a child attending the service to enable the child to participate in the programme known as the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) funding Programme.”

Compliance Information

(1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) A designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to carry out the inspection.

Nine staff members are employed by the service which includes the registered provider.

(2) (a)&(b) Eighteen validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the 9 staff members. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was available for 2 staff members who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) All childcare staff members had a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

(6) (a) One staff member was employed under the scheme known as the Access and Inclusion Model.

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) Present on the day of inspection were the manager and 6 childcare staff caring for 31 children.

(2) On the morning of the inspection the following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at capacity:

The **Yellow** room had 16 children ranging in age from 2 years 10 months to 4 years being cared for by 3 staff (1 staff member was providing AIM support)

The **Blue** room had 10 children ranging in age from 2 years 10 months to 4 years being cared for by 2 staff.

The **Purple** room had 5 children ranging in age from 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 1 staff.

Additionally, the manager was available to staff throughout the morning as required.

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:

- The atmosphere in the service was warm and child centred. The staff members were observed to be caring and attentive in their interactions with the children, responding meaningfully to the children's verbal and non-verbal cues and providing praise and encouragement using gentle tones of voice.
- The children in the service were encouraged to value and respect each other and this was particularly evidenced by the positive regard shown by the children and staff members towards children with additional communication needs in the service.
- The staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with discreet supervision provided and assistance if required.
- All children engaged in outdoor play on the day of inspection and were observed happily selecting their preferred play materials and activities.
- Regular hand washing practices were observed throughout the morning as children washed hands before snack after toileting and outdoor play and as needed. Self-toileting was supported, and children were supervised as necessary.

Supporting Relationships Around the Children:

- The children in the service were encouraged to value and respect each other and this was particularly evidenced by the positive regard shown by the children and staff members towards children with additional communication needs in the service.
- The staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with discreet supervision provided and assistance if required.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The pre-school rooms were equipped with low level child sized tables and chairs. Low level open shelving and tables ensured equipment and materials were easily accessible to the children. Soft mats and cushions were available in the rest areas for the children. Other materials included crayons, paper, art and craft materials for cutting and sticking, Montessori equipment, natural and openended materials, dolls, cars, tracks, and building blocks. Children's artwork was noted displayed in the room. Equipment in the outdoor play area included a sheltered area with the kitchen, playhouse, messy play area, water play area and floor play area. A climbing frame, ride on toys and balls 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

General Safety:

The main entrance to the preschool was secure and controlled by staff to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised and restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the preschool. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment and safe storage of cleaning agents.

Infection Control:

Cleaning schedules were available.

Administration of Medication:

Written parental consent for the administration of medication, including temperature reducing medication was required for each child attending the service.

Fire Safety:

Staff were familiar with the safe evacuation procedures in the event of an emergency occurring in the service and all fire exits were unobstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. A fire assembly point was not clearly identified in the service.

Infection Control:

2. Water at the wash hand basins for children in the sanitary accommodation was cold throughout the inspection
3. Facilities for hand drying were inadequate and unsuitable and were an infection control risk. Cloth towels were observed in the children’s sanitary accommodation which were then replaced with toilet roll. Both of these hand drying options are inadequate in an early years’ service.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. A ‘fire assembly point’ sign is now displayed. Metal sign is fixed to the wall outside.

Infection Control:

2. Plumber fixed the water in the sanitary accommodation it now meets standard requirements. Staff instructed to monitor temperatures regularly and let registered provider know if temperature changes.
3. Ensure adequate supply of paper towels. Ensure stock of paper towels are ordered on time and not let stock get so low before putting order in. Cloth towels are not used.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Fire assembly point sign observed by Inspector in place.

Infection Control:

Plumber's report received by Early Years Inspectorate.

Photographic evidence of paper towels now in place submitted to Inspectorate.

Summary Comment

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

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.

Compliance Information

(1) A record was kept of each child's time of arrival and departure on a daily basis by the staff members

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 service provided evidence that persons had up to date First Aid Responders course and were available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)(a) and (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and safely stored in the premises.

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 was maintained of all fire drills which had been completed in the service. Fire drills were carried out monthly.

(b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire extinguishers serviced on the 9th September 2024 and smoke alarms in the premises were serviced on the 4th September 2024.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed in the premises

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that the service was adequately insured for 44 children attending at any one time. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28th March 2024 to the 27th March 2025.