

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH214
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Name of Service:	Woodlands Montessori
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Address of Service:	Rathfeigh, Tara, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	C15 EFH6
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Name of Registered Provider:	Patricia Pentony
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	15/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	10	PM	0
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath C15 CP23
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Taaffe
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

Woodlands Montessori a privately owned and operated early years service located in a rural setting in Co. Meath which has been in operation since 2015. The service accommodates a maximum of 11 pre-school children aged 2½ years to 6 years on a sessional basis and operates from 9.00am to 12.00midday from Monday to Friday for 38 weeks each year. Eligible children are facilitated to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The service is conducted from one pre-school room with adjoining designated children's sanitary facilities which are constructed on the ground floor of the registered provider's family home. A fully enclosed outdoor play area adjoins and is accessed directly from the pre-school room which is located to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider operates the service single-handedly and is the designated person in charge on a daily basis. An emergency contact person who resides in close proximity to the service is available to assist if required in the event of an emergency.

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. 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 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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The registered provider is the designated person in charge of the service on a daily basis, with a named emergency contact person available in close proximity to be called upon in the event of an emergency.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service, working directly with the children, when the inspector arrived unannounced at 9.20am on the day of inspection and was present for the duration of the inspection.

(2)(a)(b) Two written references from past employers were available for the registered provider and 2 written, validated references were available for the named emergency contact person.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider and for the emergency contact person.

These records demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for the registered provider who had resided in a country outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) The sole-operating registered provider had documentation available to show that her qualification had been assessed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and was deemed to be equivalent to a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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) thereof at that reference number is satisfied.*
- (8) (c) *a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

- (1) There was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children in the service on the day of inspection.
- (3) The registered provider was caring for 10 children aged 2 years 10 months to 4 years 7 months, all of whom were attending the service on a sessional basis.
- (8)(c) The registered provider ensured that a second person familiar with the operation of the service was available to assist at all times when the service was in operation, to be called upon in the event of an emergency.

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 examples demonstrate how the registered provider supported each child's learning, development and well-being in the service:

Basic needs:

- The atmosphere in the service was warm and child centred. It was observed that the children appeared relaxed and comfortable with moments of fun, laughter and enjoyment observed taking place between the registered provider and children throughout the session.
- Healthy snacks were provided from home for the children in the service. The registered provider sat with the children at snack time encouraging conversation and extending interactions in a relaxed manner. The children enjoyed their snack at picnic benches positioned on artificial grass under a covered canopy outside the entrance door to the service.
- All children in the service were facilitated to engage in outdoor play on the day of inspection, dressed appropriately for the cold dry weather. The children were also facilitated to engage in physical activity indoors during the session, enthusiastically participating in a music and dancing activity.
- The close proximity of the sanitary accommodation to the pre-school room facilitated children to use the toilet independently, with assistance provided by the registered provider when necessary. The service policy requires children to be toilet trained prior to commencement.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The registered provider spoke positively and kindly to and about the children, and engaged with the children in an interested and kind manner. The registered provider demonstrated that she knew the children well, recognising and valuing their individual preferences and interests.
- The registered provider was observed to build the children's confidence by her support and encouragement especially when the children were developing new skills. The children's independence was encouraged with the registered provider heard readily providing encouragement and praise for the children's efforts and accomplishments and responding promptly and kindly when children needed assistance.
- The inspector observed that children's transitions were well supported. Timers, a bell and verbal strategies including prompts and songs which the children were familiar with were used by the registered provider to inform and prepare children for up-coming activities and movement. The registered provider
- Family photographs were on display which supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service and bridged the gap between the service and home. Emails, telephone calls, a softwear application and a monthly newsletter was amongst the methods used by the registered provider to communicate with parents in relation to their children's play and learning. The registered provider was observed greeting parents in a friendly and familiar way on their arrival to the service at the end of the session.

Physical and material environment:

- The layout of the pre-school room and the outdoor play area supported the children's independence in making choices and provided lots of opportunity for the children to initiate and take the lead in activities. The children were observed collaborating with each other in relation to their play plans.
- Play materials and specialist Montessori equipment was laid out in defined interest areas to facilitate children to initiate and sustain meaningful play activities. The interest areas included practical life, sensorial, numeracy, language and cultural areas and a well-resourced home corner. A large tray-top table containing coloured dried rice facilitated sensory play opportunities in the pre-school room.
- There was a small comfortable and suitable area in the library corner of the pre-school room for a child to rest or take a break from activities if required.

- The spacious outdoor play area which was fully enclosed by walls, fencing and hedging was mainly surfaced in grass, with a concrete section and pathway provided at the entrance to the service. Outdoor play materials included a raised wooden playhouse with slide attached, a well-resourced outdoor kitchen placed under a wooden roofed structure, a wooden see-saw, a metal domed climbing frame, and a large lidded sand pit.

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 following are examples of measures undertaken by the registered provider to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service:

General Safety:

- The premises and outdoor play area was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service. The main gate leading from the roadway into the service grounds was locked, and the entrance gate leading into the outdoor play area was secured when the inspector arrived unannounced and for the duration of the inspection.
- The water temperature in the sanitary accommodation in the service did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance. The inspector was informed that the warm water supply was thermostatically controlled.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.
- The registered provider's residence which adjoined the pre-school room was inaccessible to the children during the inspection.

Infection Control:

- Running warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels provided for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service. The children were gently encouraged and reminded

by the registered provider to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play.

- A refrigerator was provided in the pre-school room and used for the storage of the children's snacks which were provided from home. This reduced the risk of bacteria multiplying to levels which could result in food contamination.
- The premises, play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition. There was a process in place for the cleaning of toys and equipment.
- The outdoor sand pit was fitted with a secure lid to prevent contamination by animals and birds.

Administration of Medication:

- An appropriate medication administration record template was available to be used in the event that a child required medication to be administered at the service.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency exit doors were clear and 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.

(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 held in-date first aid response (FAR) training as evidenced in the records provided for inspection. The registered provider's scheduled attendance in the service on a daily basis ensured that a suitably trained first aider was at all times immediately available to the children when the service was in operation.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid box was suitably equipped and easily accessible to the registered provider and available at all times for the children when in attendance at the service.

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, with the records indicating and the registered provider reporting that fire drills were carried out on a monthly basis. The last recorded fire drill took place on 19/12/2024.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. The fire extinguishers were certified as having been serviced in February 2024 and the smoke detection system on 06/06/2024.
- (4) The evacuation procedure which contained details in relation to the procedure to be conducted in the event of a fire was displayed in the pre-school room.

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 20 pre-school children attending the service on a sessional basis. The policy showed that the service was insured until 27/11/2025.