

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MO002
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Name of Service:	Acorns Academy
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Address of Service:	Manulla, Castlebar, Co. Mayo
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Eircode:	F23 DP22
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Name of Registered Provider:	Eileen McNeela
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	31/07/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	24	PM	24
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA, Child and Family Agency, 2nd Floor, St Mary's HQ, Castlebar, Co Mayo.
Inspection undertaken by:	M Farrell
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

Acorns Academy is a privately owned and operated service in a rural area in Manulla, County Mayo. The service provides full day care, parttime and sessional services and is open from 8:00 to 18:00 hours. The premises is a building converted for use as a childcare facility and there is a well-developed enclosed outdoor play area for the children to the rear of the building. There are three playrooms, a sleep room/sensory room, a kitchen and dining area, office and sanitary facilities provided. The Pre-preschool playroom was closed at the time of the inspection due to maintenance work and did not form part of this inspection. A new sensory garden for the children has been developed beside the outdoor area to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are 12 staff in the service at present including the registered provider, childcare staff and a chef.

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/safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 15, 23, 25, 26, 27 and 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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.*

(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 and there was a named person to deputise in her absence.
- (b) The deputy person in charge was available in the service during the inspection. Discussion with staff and review of records found that either the designated person in charge or deputy were always available in the service during opening hours.
- (2) The deputy designated person in charge confirmed following review of service records that there were 12 adults in the service at the time of the inspection. The following vetting documents were made available for inspection for the adults:
- (a) 2 written validated references from past employers, particularly the most recent employer for 7 adults. 1 written validated reference from a past employer for 3 of the adults.
- (b) 2 written validated reference from sources other than past employers for 1 adult and 1 written reference from another source for 2 adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 12 adults. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting for staff members every three years.
- (d) International police vetting documentation was available for 4 adults who had lived outside of the State for periods longer than six consecutive months as adults.
- (4) Evidence of the required qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent was available for the 11 staff who worked directly with the preschool children.

Non-Compliance Information

The following vetting information was unavailable for inspection:

(2)

(a) and (b)

A second written validated reference from a past employer was required for one adult.

There was no evidence of the validation by the service of two written references from sources other than past employers file for one adult. It was established from this adult's employment history that references from past employers were required as the adult had previous employments.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in a written response that:

(2) (a) and (b)

Corrective and Preventive Action

A second written reference from a past employer for one adult has been received and validated.

Written references from past employers for the second adult have been received and validated.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of references and validations.

Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the service to the Inspectorate have been reviewed and found to have addressed the non-compliance found on inspection under Regulation 9.

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) There were 7 adults working directly with 23 children on the inspectors' unannounced arrival to the service. An additional child arrived later to the service bringing the total number of children present to 24 children.
- (2) The minimum adult to child ratios were maintained during the unannounced inspection as follows:
Playroom: 2 staff cared for 7 children aged from 2 to 3 years of age attending parttime of full day care services.

Preschool playroom: 3 staff cared for 17 children aged from 3 to 5 years of age attending parttime or full day care services.

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)

A random sample of ten children's records were reviewed by the inspector. The records were found to contain the information required under the regulation.

(3) (c)

The records were made available to the inspector in the service by the deputy designated person in charge when requested.

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 door was secured on the inspector's unannounced arrival to the service with a doorbell system in place to gain staff's attention. The inspector was admitted by staff following production and review of identification documentation. Written records of the inspector's attendance in the service were kept. Cleaning products were stored at high levels out of reach of children. The toys and play equipment were in good condition and suitable for the ages and stages of the children using them during the inspection. Internal door handles were positioned at high levels where needed to allow staff to control access to areas. The alarm on the push down door handle in the sleep room was in working order when tested on the day. Blind cords were secured with securing devices. Restrictor devices were in place on low-level windows to prevent children from leaving the area unnoticed. No hazards were observed in the enclosed outdoor play area. The oil tank and boiler were inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

There was refrigerator in the hallway provided for the storage of children's snacks containing perishable food items under 5°C as required. Liquid soap and paper towels were provided for handwashing and drying. Children washed their hands following playing outdoors, using the toilet and before eating. Foot pedal operated bins were provided and used for the disposal of waste. Cleaning programmes and schedules were on display for different areas such as the toilet areas. The staff kept written records of the cleaning carried out in the service. The service was to close the next day for three weeks and was to be deep cleaned and painted. Aprons and gloves were provided for staff to wear when changing nappies in accordance with the service's nappy changing procedure on display in the nappy changing area. The children's bed linen is laundered in the service at least weekly and more frequently as needed.

Administration of Medication:

The staff informed the inspector that none of the children attending the service at present required medication to be administered while in the service. The staff were aware of safe procedures for the storage and administration

of medication in the service. Temperature reducing medication was safely stored in the office and was inaccessible by the children.

Safe Sleep:

The children in the service were aged over two years. There was a separate sleep room and the air temperature of the room was recorded at 19.1°C at 13:45 hrs before two children were placed down to sleep on stackable beds. The staff carried out and recorded observations of sleeping/resting children at ten-minute intervals including observations of their breathing patterns, colour and position.

Fire Safety:

The emergency exit routes were observed to be clear from obstructions during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

- The water from the warm water taps in both sinks in the children's sanitary area used by the Preschool playroom was not warm and was recorded at 19.7°C at 11:00hrs where children were washing their hands at snack-time. The water temperature had increased to 23.1°C and 23.5°C when rechecked at 13:52hrs. This was a repeat non-compliance from the most recent inspection on 4 September 2025.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in a written response that:

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

The running water temperature is now at the correct temperatures. A staff member has been assigned the daily duty of making sure the water heating system is turned on first thing each morning to ensure water temperatures are in the correct range. The staff will ensure the water heating system is turned on first thing each morning.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

Photographic evidence.

Summary Comment

The regulatory non-compliance found on inspection has been addressed by the actions and evidence submitted to the Inspectorate by the service.

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) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available in the playrooms with additional supplies available in the office if needed.

(b) The first aid equipment was readily available if need to treat a child.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) There was no adult with First Aid Response (FAR) training available in the service on the day of the inspection. It is acknowledged that some of the staff members present on the day held paediatric first aid training, but this training does not meet the regulatory requirements.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in a written response that:

(1)

Corrective and Preventive Action

Another member of staff undertook a FAR training during the summer so the service will have two staff members with FAR training. The service will ensure that a member of staff with FAR is always on site.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of FAR training certificate for a second adult.

Summary Comment

The regulatory non-compliance found on inspection has been addressed by the actions and evidence submitted by the service to the Inspectorate.

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 of monthly fire drills were kept by staff. The last fire drill undertaken in the service was dated the 14 July 2025.
- (b) Maintenance records for the smoke/fire alarms were available with last the maintenance dated as the 27 March 2025.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed if a fire occurs in the service were observed to be on display in the playrooms.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) (b) The fire-fighting equipment servicing records available in the service showed that they were last serviced on 6 September 2023. Fire-fighting equipment is required to be serviced/maintained on an annual basis. It is acknowledged that following the inspection a maintenance certificate dated the 1 August 2025 was submitted by the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in a written response that:

(1)(b)

Corrective and Preventive Action

The firefighting equipment has been serviced, and a certificate is displayed in the main entrance hall. The service will ensure the firefighting equipment is serviced and maintained on a yearly basis.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of certificate.

Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the service has been reviewed by the Inspectorate and deemed to have addressed the regulatory non-compliance found on inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The children in both playrooms were observed to be always supervised by the staff during the inspection. At dinnertime in the Preschool playroom, the staff were observed to sit with the children, chatting with them while supervising them closely. When playing outside in the enclosed outdoor area, the staff moved around allowing them to keep the children in their line of vision. The older children used the toilets by themselves when they needed to but were within earshot of staff members if they needed any help.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

A certificate of insurance for provision of full day care service for a maximum of 52 children was available in the service with an expiry date of 27 March 2026.