

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2015MO055

Name of Service: Hunt Montessori School

Address of Service: Behybaun, Foxford Road, Ballina, Co. Mayo

Eircode: F26 FW32

Name of Registered Provider: Mary Hunt

Service type: Sessional

Date of Inspection: 11/11/2025

No of pre-school children: AM 19 PM -

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: Early Year's 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

Description of service

Hunt Montessori School is a privately operated, sessional service located on the outskirts of Ballina, Co Mayo. The service is registered to cater for children aged from 2-6 years of age. Morning sessions from 9:00-12:00 hours and afternoon sessions from 12:30-15:30 hours are provided by the service. The premises is in a dedicated section of the registered provider's home with one large playroom and sanitary accommodation available to the children. The children have access to large outdoor play areas with play equipment on the premises.

Staffing

There are three staff working in the service including the registered provider who works directly with the children. At the time of the placement there was an adult student on practice placement in the service.

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, 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

Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that there were three staff members in the service and an adult student on practice placement.

- (1)
- (a) There was a designated person in charge in the service and a named adult to deputise in her absence.
 - (b) Either the designated person in charge or deputy were available on the premises throughout the period of inspection. Records showed that either the designated person or deputy person in charge were always available in the service during opening hours.
 - (c) The staff showed awareness of their roles and responsibilities during conversations with the inspector.
- (2) (a) and (b)
- Two written validated references were provided for the four adults in the service.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all four adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
 - (d) International police vetting documentation was available for one adult who had lived outside of the State for a period longer than six months as an adult.
- (4) Evidence of the required qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent was available for three staff who worked directly with the preschool children.

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) During the inspection an adequate number of adults were observed to work directly with the children in the service. On the inspector's announced arrival to the service there were 2 adults working directly with 19 children.
- An adult student was present in the service for the session.
- (3) The minimum ratio for sessional services providing care to children over 2 ½ years of 1 adult to each 11 children was adhered to with two to three adults working directly with a maximum of 19 children during the inspection.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider ensured written records were kept of the following information in the service:
- (a) The name, position, qualifications and experience of the staff members were kept in staff vetting files.
 - (b) Information on the service types and ages of children that the service is registered to provide in the service's statement of purpose and function.
 - (c) Details of the adult to child ratios in the service.
 - (d) Information on the type of care or programme provided in the service.
 - (e) Details of the facilities available in the service
 - (f) Information regarding the service's hours of opening and fees.

- (g) The service’s policies, procedures and statements as required under Regulation 10 that were in a service policy folder and some were stored electronically.
 - (h) Details of the attendance of each pre-school child recorded daily on an electronic system.
 - (i) Details of the staff daily working hours and rosters on an electronic staff attendance system.
 - (j) A template electronic medication record system was available to record medication administration should it be required to be given to a child.
 - (k) Accident and incidents were kept electronically in the service and the sample viewed had been notified to parents.
- (3) The records were made available to the inspector in the service by the staff on request.

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 staff placed an emphasis on children’s individual choices and they were supported to choose their own play activities from the open storage systems during the session. The service had a range of toys and play equipment including Montessori equipment. Children were observed to choose to play with practical life items that supported learning skills such as threading beads and using tweezers to develop fine motor skills. The types of play equipment available to the children were varied including a home corner with toy kitchen where a group of children played ‘house’ with dolls. Some children enjoyed dressing up in doctors coats with toy stethoscopes and masks while other children played with a toy doll head playing hairdresser using recycled hairdryer. Children played with agricultural toys such as a field with artificial grass, plastic farm animals and toy tractors. The staff were observed to join children in their play involving themselves in the activities and encouraging them to use their imaginations and develop their play. There was an extensive selection of tabletop games and activities and children played with plastic bricks and wooden building blocks in groups. Once children had finished playing with items, they were observed to tidy up the equipment and replace it in the open storage systems. A range of art and craft supplies

were provided in the playroom and examples of children's artwork were available to the inspector.

Children were observed to enjoy drawing in groups at tables and proudly showed the staff their work receiving praise and encouragement from the staff. Messy play was facilitated at an activity table during the session with playdough that was coloured purple with glitter chosen by the children.

A large selection of age-appropriate books was available in open storage systems beside a rest area with soft furnishings. The children were sitting in a group on a rug having a story read to them by a staff member on the inspector's unannounced arrival to the service. There was a discussion about the story between the staff and children at the end of the story.

The weather was inclement during the inspection and the children were not observed to play outdoors. The children had wellington boots that were stored in the service for outdoor play. The children and staff told the inspector that they had played on ride-on toys outdoors in the outdoor area to the front of the building the previous day. The children were observed to move around freely in the playroom and following story time early in the session, the staff played music and the children danced energetically and sang along to the music.

There was a keyworker system in place in the service with the children assigned to keyworker groups which were displayed on a door in the playroom. The children's behaviour was observed to be managed in a positive manner with the staff modelling positive behaviours for them. The staff responded sensitively to the children's needs in a timely manner for example when a child was upset and not settling after a time, their parents were contacted. The staff showed the inspector samples of children's individual learning journals including information and photographs of the children engaging in different play activities. The learning journals were sent home monthly for the parents to look at. The staff recorded observations in relation to the children's progress in the service on an electronic application which were available to parents to view.

Different festivals were celebrated in the service for example the children told the inspector that they had a recent Halloween disco and had dressed up as their favourite characters. A "friendship flower" with petals containing each of children's names was displayed in the playroom reinforcing a sense of belonging in the service for the children.

The children brought food from home for their snacks in line with the service's healthy eating policy. The snacks included items such as chopped fruit and vegetables, crackers, yoghurts, cheese and bread. The children sat in groups at tables with the staff to eat their meal. Each child had an individual drink container and there was water available throughout the session to children if they wanted a drink.

The children were encouraged to use the toilet by themselves when they needed to. Staff prompted the children to wash their hands with warm water and liquid soap and dry them with paper towels at key moments for example before eating and after using the toilet. Boxes of tissue were provided at low levels for children to access to clean their noses when needed.

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.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

- (1) Each child was checked in and out of the service by a staff member with up-to-date records kept for example when a child left the service with a parent at 10:56am it was recorded immediately by staff.
- (3) (a) The staff approved the entry of the inspector to the service following review of identification documentation.
- (b) Written details of the entry to the premises of the inspector were recorded in a visitor record book.

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 were supervised mainly by sight by the adults apart from when using the toilets adjacent to the playroom where the children remained within earshot of the adults if they needed assistance. When a child was upset and crying, they were lifted on to a staff member's lap and observed closely by the staff member who comforted the child. At lunchtime, the adults sat with the children and ate with them whilst supervising them. The staff were observed to link in with each other ensuring children were supervised at all times during the inspection.