

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2015SO001

Name of Service: Acorn Montessori School

Address of Service: Cliffoney National School, Cliffoney, Co. Sligo

Eircode: F91 YC85

Name of Registered Provider: Kelley Sweeney Kelly

Service type: Sessional

Date of Inspection: 14/06/2024

No of pre-school children: AM 20 PM -

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

Description of service

Acorn Montessori School is a privately owned and operated sessional service in the village of Cliffoney, Co Sligo. The service is registered to open daily from 9:05 to 12:05 hours catering for children aged from 2 to 6 years of age. The service is in a dedicated section of a local primary school. There is one large playroom, a small store area and sanitary facilities. The children have access to an outdoor space with a variety of outdoor play equipment.

Staffing

There are four staff working in the service including the registered provider who works directly with the children. Two of the staff are employed under the Access and Inclusion Model 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/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under sections of regulations 8, 9, 11, 15, 21, 23, 25 and 28. 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 registered provider, person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

(3) Where a registered provider has been unable for good and proper reason to notify the Agency within the time specified in paragraph (1) or (2), as the case may be, of a change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2), the registered provider shall notify the Agency in writing of the change as soon as possible thereafter.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) & (3)

The service was registered to operate between the hours of 9:05-12:05 hours however the service had extended their opening hours to 8:35-12:05 hours without approval from the Early Years Inspectorate.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

(1) and (3)

The registered provider advised in a written response that:

Corrective and Preventive Action

The service reverted to the registered hours of operation from 9:05 –12:05 hours for the next seven days which was the remainder of the school term and completed a Change in Circumstance proposal. Should the service wish to make changes in future, the registered provider will apply for a Change in Circumstances (CIC) and allow at least 60 days' notice for any proposed change. The registered provider has applied for a Change in Circumstances for the new school term, from 29 August 2024 to change the hours of operation and received notification that the proposed change in hours has been granted.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of receipt of approval of requested change to opening hours and copy of attendance records.

Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider have been reviewed by the Early Years Inspectorate and been deemed to have addressed the regulatory non-compliance found on 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 was the designated person in charge in the service.
 - (b) There was a named person to deputise in the service in the absence of the designated person in charge.
- (2) (a), (b) and (d)
- It was confirmed with the designated person in charge that all four staff members had been employed in the service during previous inspections. The vetting documentation for staff members in the service had been checked on previous inspections and found to be compliant under the regulation.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all four staff. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting for staff members every three years.

- (4)
- The qualifications for the four staff members had been reviewed on previous inspection and were found to meet the regulatory requirements.

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) The registered provider ensured that an adequate number of adults worked directly with the children attending the service. There were 4 adults working directly with 19 children on the inspector's unannounced arrival to the service on the morning of the inspection. An additional child arrived later to the service bringing the total number of children present to 20.
- (3) The minimum ratio for a sessional service of at least 1 adult to each 11 children was adhered to with 4 adults working directly with 20 children during the inspection

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)

The inspector and designated person in charge selected ten of the children’s records for review. The children’s records contained the information required under the regulation.

(3) (c)

The required information was made readily available for inspection by the designated person in charge on request.

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 registered provider ensured that there was adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available to the children and staff on the premises. The equipment in use in the service was clean and well maintained. There was a wide range of toys and play equipment both indoors and outdoors to support the children’s development. The service had a Montessori based ethos reflected in the large amount of Montessori equipment such as dressing frames, broad stairs, pink tower, geometric shapes and wooden spindles provided in the playroom. The equipment in the playroom was arranged on low level shelving into labelled Montessori themed areas of sensorial, mathematics, language, culture and practical life. The low-level shelving facilitated children selecting their preferred activities and replacing them after use. There was a nature table with assortment of plants and a sea themed wooden box with shells, driftwood and sand. The playroom also had a butterfly garden consisting of a mesh type structure containing butterflies that had hatched which the children showed the inspector. A cosy corner with soft furnishings was available for children to rest if they wished during the session and was positioned beside a library area with a selection of age-appropriate books. Art and craft supplies were provided with aprons available to protect children’s clothing during activities.

The chairs were appropriate sizes for the children using them and the tables had adjustable height mechanism in place. Staff had access to larger chairs.

The children had access to a dedicated section of the school’s outdoor play area with a wide variety of outdoor toys. Play equipment to promote physical activity and gross motor development included a slide, ride on toys, balance activities and a low-level climbing system. A range of toys to support imaginative play included mud kitchens and a wooden shed stored a tool bench with tools, kitchen and dolls with pushchairs. Messy play was supported for example with a covered sandbox. Outdoor seating was available with several brightly painted picnic benches positioned on a grassed area

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:

Blind cords on windows were secured with safety devices. The main external entrance door to the service was secured to prevent children from leaving unnoticed and unauthorised access by people. The outdoor area was enclosed and had gates with securing mechanisms in place. Cleaning products were stored in a secured cupboard under the sink in the playroom. Visitors to the service were requested to sign in the visitor book once their identity had been established. The children had individually labelled supplies of suncream provided from home that were stored in a container and available to staff to be applied in accordance with the service's sunscreen policy. The toys and play equipment were in good condition and suitable for the age and developmental stages of the children using them.

Infection Control:

Cleaning schedules were available for different areas in the service and records of cleaning and disinfecting were kept electronically by staff members. The service was found to be very clean, and staff were observed to clean down surfaces after use for example tables were cleaned by staff after mealtime. The staff prompted and supervised the children to wash their hands before and after eating and using the toilet. Warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were available in the sanitary units for handwashing and drying. A box of tissue was available at a low level for children to clean their noses with if needed. The children's snacks containing perishable food items were stored in a refrigerator in the playroom.

Administration of Medication:

A secured storage space was available for medication in the service. The staff showed awareness of the correct procedures regarding administration of medication during discussion with the inspector. A record book was available for staff to record administration of medication to a child if it was required to be administered to them while they were attending the service. Training for staff had been sourced were relevant in relation to medication administration.

Fire Safety:

The emergency exit routes were found to be free from obstruction during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The internal door leading into the service from the primary school was not secured to allow the staff to control access to the service during the inspection. It is acknowledged that the registered provider submitted photographic evidence following the inspection of a securing mechanism now in place at the door to allow staff to control access.

Infection Control:

2. The waste bin provided in the staff sanitary unit was a push top bin and not foot pedal operated as required.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider advised in a written response that:

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Following the inspection a securing mechanism was put in place to allow staff to control access to the service from the primary school. The service will ensure that the internal door is always secured.

Infection Control:

2. A foot pedal operated bin is now in place in the staff sanitary unit. Staff have liaised with the primary school to ensure the foot pedal operated bin in the sanitary unit remains in place.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliance found on inspection by the actions taken and the evidence submitted to the Early Years Inspectorate.

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) Certificate of completion of First Aid Response (FAR) training courses were available for three staff members present on the day of inspection with expiry dates ranging from the 28 January 2025 to the 3 July 2025.
- (2)
 - (a) An appropriately stocked first aid box was safely stored in an easily accessible location in the playroom.
 - (b) The first aid equipment was readily accessible to the staff if a child required first aid treatment.

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 required adult: child ratios were adhered to during the inspection. There was a visit by paramedics with an ambulance to the service on the day. An activity was also arranged to support the transition of older children that were leaving the service and starting school in the primary school that the service was located in. The staff had arranged that children would be brought in small groups to the ambulance to speak with the paramedics and look at the equipment. Two staff members were always present supervising the small groups of children when they were in the ambulance. The other two staff members supervised the children taking part in the transition activity with the primary school. The children were supervised by the adults mainly by sight but were out of sight remaining within earshot of the adults when using the toilet independently. The staff were observed to closely supervise the children when eating their meal towards the end of the session.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had a certificate of insurance for sessional service provision for a maximum of 22 children available for inspection with an expiry date of the 27 March 2025.