

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015SO035
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	Little Meadows Nursery & Montessori
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	31 The Meadows, Grange, Co. Sligo
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<b>Eircode:</b>	F91 FW65
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Sharon Warnock
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	08/07/2024
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	22	PM	20
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	L McGlynn
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable
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### Description of service

Little Meadows Nursery & Montessori is a privately owned and operated early years' service providing full day, part time and sessional preschool care for children aged 2-6 years. The service operates from 8.00am to 5.30pm each weekday and is also registered to provide school aged care.

The service operates from a two-storey purpose-built building located in a residential area in a village in north County Sligo. There are three care rooms, two on the ground floor and one on the first floor. A fully enclosed outdoor play area is accessible from the ground floor.

### Staffing

There were eight staff members employed to work directly with the children, five of which were present on the day of inspection. The registered provider was not present on the day of inspection was confirmed by the person in charge to be involved in the day-to-day operation of the service. There was a named person in charge present during the inspection.

### 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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23 and 28; however, on inspection an additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 22. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation 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, 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

- (1) (a) The registered provider is the named person in charge of the daily operation of the service and there were two persons named as deputies in the event of their absence.
- (b) A review of the weekly staff roster demonstrated that the person in charge or one of the named deputies was rostered to be on the premises during the hours of operation.
- (c) A detailed job description was located within each file outlining the roles and responsibilities of each employee and staff members confirmed that all employees report to the registered provider.
- (2) A review of records demonstrated that there were four new staff members recruited since the last regulatory inspection on 15 February 2021. The files relating to the four other staff members including the

registered provider were assessed on previous inspection and deemed to meet the regulatory requirement therefore were not assessed as part of this inspection.

- (a) (b) There were six references for three staff members from past employers or in the case where there were no past employers, a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (4) Evidence of the completion of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Qualifications Framework was available for three staff members.

### Non-Compliance Information

- (2) (a) (b) The two references on file for one staff member could not be accepted as they were from sources other than the listed past employers on the staff members employment record.
- (d) The employment history of one staff member was not dated therefore the requirement for international police vetting could not be determined.
- (4) It could not be determined from the information provided that one staff member had obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Qualifications Framework.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

- (2) (a) (b) The staff member was contacted immediately, and an additional reference was requested from their most recent employer, before starting at Little Meadows. When the reference was received, the authenticity of the new reference was verified by phone. The recruitment policy has been updated to clearly state that all references must come from the most recent past employers as stated on the candidates CV. A checklist has now been compiled and attached to all staff files, to ensure all references meet the necessary criteria for employment.
- (d) The staff member was contacted immediately to obtain the missing dates for their employment history as listed on their CV. Once an updated CV was received, employment history was reviewed to determine if international police vetting was required. The staff member file has been updated with the new CV which clearly outlines the dates of their past employment. International police vetting was not required. The recruitment policy

has been updated to clearly state: That the candidate's employment history must be dated chronologically. And an explanation would be sought for any gaps identified, to determine if international police vetting is required.

(4) The staff member was contacted immediately and asked to contact ATU Sligo (formerly IT Sligo) to request confirmation on the completion of their Level 8 degree in Early Childhood Care & Education, as the name of the Level 8 degree achieved is not stated on the certificate. The recruitment policy has been updated to clearly state: qualification certificates will be checked, and they must clearly state the name of the relevant qualification, which will be verified against the National Qualification Framework.

### **Supporting documentation submitted**

Copies of a staff employment record, validated references, service policy, checklist and evidence of completed qualifications were submitted to evidence compliance.

### **Summary Comment**

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 9 have been adequately addressed.

### 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) An adequate number of adults worked with the children on the day of the inspection. A review of the staff roster and a sample review of staff attendance records found that adequate numbers of staff were allocated to work with the numbers of children attending considering their age ranges.

(2) On the inspector's arrival to the service there were 22 children being cared for by four adults in three care rooms. In the tiny tot's room, five children aged two to three years were cared for by one staff member. In the bizzzy bees' room, seven children aged three to four years were cared for by one staff member. In the Montessori room, 10 children aged three to five years were cared for by two staff members. In the afternoon, there were 20 children cared for by three staff members in two care rooms.

In addition to this, there was one staff member present and providing additional support as required in all rooms throughout the day.

### 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

Children were observed to be eating food provided from home at regular intervals throughout the day. During mealtimes, children fed themselves with staff providing assistance when required with younger children when opening food items. Each child's drinking bottle was available in the rooms on easily accessible low-level shelving. Children were freely moving around the care rooms and as the weather was favourable, all children spent extended periods of time playing outdoors. Staff were vigilant to the need for children to be protected from direct sunlight and were observed erecting an umbrella style canopy over the picnic table while children were having their snack. Individually labelled sunscreen was observed in the care rooms and the service had a policy on sun care for children while attending the service.

Nappy changes were carried out on a scheduled basis and more frequently if required. Staff members engaged with children during the process and encouraged independence where possible. Older children were independent when using the toilet facilities and gentle reminders around handwashing were given to children.

Staff were observed to be warm and responsive in their interactions with children. The staff members regularly positioned themselves alongside children while playing and were responsive to children's needs for comfort which was given in a caring manner. During playtime, children were encouraged by staff to work together and take turns promoting an ethos of friendship among children. Minor behaviour instances were dealt with in a positive manner by staff and situations were resolved with ease. Children appeared relaxed and comfortable in the environment, transitions were managed well and children appeared at ease with the activities of the day. Staff maintained jovial, engaging conversation with children throughout the day. There were areas within each room for children to relax or rest comfortably. Soft seating, cushions and mats were available in the rooms for children to use if they chose to rest during the session.

Each of the three care rooms were resourced with age-appropriate equipment and learning materials suitable for the age and stage of development of the children attending. A range of fine motor play items were available in

each room including jigsaws, shape sorters, peg boards, magnets and plastic bricks. The rooms also contained a home corner/ kitchen/shop area, dress up, construction and baby care items to promote imaginary play. A range of small world items such as animals, figurines, trucks and vehicles were also available in the rooms and small activity units such as garages and dolls houses were available to support children’s play with the items. Children also had access in each room to art materials such as paint and crayons promoting their creative expression and sensory play was facilitated with low level sand and water trays. There was a small supply of age-appropriate books and reading materials in each room stored on low level units accessible to the children. Storage areas throughout the building housed an abundance of additional play equipment for rotation throughout the year. In the Montessori room there were clearly defined areas of interest reflecting the Montessori pedagogy of the service including practical life, mathematics, language and cultural areas. Specific Montessori equipment was accessible to children at all times and children were observed casually playing with the filling/pouring items while waiting for their lunch.

Children had access to a range of play opportunities in the outdoor area. A small area accessible from the busy bee room was sheltered by an overhead polycarbonate roof and covered in impact absorbent ground surfacing. The area contained a range of equipment including wall mounted water activities, sand and water play, painting area and small sit on toys. The second outdoor area to the rear of the premises was subdivided to provide developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative and enriching experiences for the children attending the service. A large, uncovered area running along the back of the building provided adequate space for physical exercise, ball play, wheeled and ride on toys. The area also housed a wooden climb and slide unit. Low level wooden picnic benches in this area were used by children for their morning snack. A second area, covered with an overhead polycarbonate roof was designated as a digging area and contained a large pit of clay with a sit on digging toy. There was also a mud kitchen in this area to provide imaginary and sensory play opportunities. A third area was newly covered in artificial grass and housed swings and rope climbing equipment.

A digital application was used to communicate with parents on a daily and monthly basis. Staff informed the inspector that ad-hoc significant events/learning was documented on individual children on their profile and a generic update of activities was posted to all parents each month. An individual scrapbook of children’s artwork and photographs was maintained throughout the school year and given to parents. There was evidence in the care rooms of monthly and weekly curriculum planning including learning activities and targeted goals for children. Staff also discussed with the inspector the implementation of an individual learning plan for children with additional needs attending the service. Staff were well informed of the goals within the plan and the child’s progress with these.

## Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

### Regulation 22 – Food and drink

*A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.*

#### Non-Compliance Information

1. The staff members confirmed that some children attending the service on a full day care basis did not eat a hot meal when present in the service. Staff informed the inspector that not all children bring a hot meal from home and during each mealtime, can choose to eat whatever they want from their lunchboxes. Some of the meals observed being eaten by the children for their main meal did not contain food from all four food groups. Children were observed eating crackers, small sandwiches, chopped fruit and vegetables while others enjoyed their hot meal provided from home. Children attending a service for the full day are required to have at least two meals and two snacks offered to them, one of which is a hot meal.

#### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

##### Corrective and Preventive Action

An urgent communication letter was sent to all parents informing them of the requirement, that all children attending the service on a full-day basis must bring a hot meal from home, that is suitable for reheating. In this letter, it states the meals provided should be well-balanced and include all four of the food groups. The service's healthy eating policy has been amended to state that ALL children who attend the service for full day care are now required to take in a hot meal that is nutritionally balanced, and suitable for reheating. The table which sets out the meal and snack requirements in the Nutrition Standards for Early Learning and Care settings has also been input to the service's healthy eating policy. This policy has been shared with all staff and parents via the app.

##### Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the parent letter and the service policy was submitted.

#### Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 22 has been adequately addressed.

## 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 building was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and for the duration of the inspection.
- The boundary of the outdoor play area was secured with high level wooden fencing. An access gate leading to the front of the building was openable by staff and access from the front of the premises was restricted.
- The toys and play equipment in use during the inspection appeared to be well maintained and there was no evidence of hazards or wear and tear that posed a risk to children.
- The floor covering on the staircase was non-slip and a suitable handrail was provided. Staff were observed to monitor children when walking up and down the stairs.

##### Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels were provided to support effective hand hygiene to be undertaken in the sanitary accommodation of the service.
- The children in the service were encouraged and facilitated by staff to wash their hands before eating and following outdoor play.
- The surface areas and the play equipment were generally in a clean condition and staff were observed cleaning tables after children's play.
- Foot pedal operated bins were available throughout the service for the safe disposal of waste.
- The care rooms and sanitary accommodations were adequately ventilated by either openable windows or mechanical ventilation where there were no openings.

##### Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No children required medication to be administered on the day of inspection. Staff were conversant on the procedure to follow for the safe administration of medication if required.

### Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits were clear from obstruction and the procedure to follow in the event of an emergency evacuation was clearly displayed in each care room.

### Non-Compliance Information

#### General Safety:

1. The practice observed at the swings in the outdoor area posed a risk of injury to children. The rope of the swings had been wrapped around the crossbar at the top increasing the height of the seat and as a result, large rubber tyres were placed under the seat for children to step up on to use the swing. The placement of the tyres caused a trip hazard for children when dismounting the swing. The wrapping of the rope around the top bar meant that the swing was not being used as per the manufacture's guidance and children were swinging higher than the equipment was designed to go, posing a safety risk.
2. The door to the kitchen was opened throughout the inspection making the area accessible to children. As the kitchen houses potentially hazardous equipment for cooking and preparing meals, kitchens should be inaccessible to children.

#### Infection Control:

3. The nappy changing procedure observed in the service did not adhere to required infection control practices as follows;
  - The staff member did not change their protective apron and gloves between each change.
  - The staff member did not wash their hands after each nappy change procedure.
  - The nappy changing mat was not cleaned or wiped down after each nappy change procedure.
  - The children's hands were not washed after nappy changing.

### Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective & Preventive Action

#### General Safety:

1. The swings were immediately unwrapped from the crossbar and the tires were removed from the swing area after the inspector raised her concerns about this being a hazard. All staff were notified of this potential hazard immediately and a formal letter was sent to inform staff that swings must now be height adjusted by the adjustable rope on the swing, not by putting the swing over the crossbar, and to remove any tires as they can be a tripping hazard. Regular checks on the swing area are now in place, ensure the children have not brought the tires back into the swing area and that the rope is not over the cross bar.

- This hazard was raised immediately, and staff were informed that the kitchen is out of bounds to children and the door must remain closed at all times. Once the door is closed children are unable to attain access into the kitchen area as the handle is out of reach of children. A letter has been shared with staff informing them, that the kitchen is out of bounds for all children and the door must remain closed. A sign has been put on the door as a constant reminder to staff to keep door closed.

### Infection Control:

- Correct nappy-changing procedures have been demonstrated by management for staff, and the importance of infection control practices were emphasised. A detailed step-by-step guide on the correct procedure, including changing aprons and gloves, hand washing, cleaning the nappy mat, and washing of children's hands has been put on display in the nappy changing area. The service's nappy-changing policy has been updated to reflect correct nappy-changing procedures to ensure infection control practices are being adhered to. This policy has been shared with all staff and can be found in the policy and procedure handbook or in the policies section on the app which all staff members have access to. Also, the step-by-step guide is displayed in the nappy changing area, as a reminder of the correct procedure to follow to maintain infection control.

### Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the service policy, photographs and notices for staff were submitted.

### Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

## Part VI - Safety

### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

### Compliance Information

A certificate of adequate insurance for the number of children registered to attend the service was available to view with an expiry date of 27 March 2025.