

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO035
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Name of Service:	Little Meadows Nursery & Montessori
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Address of Service:	31 The Meadows, Grange, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F91 FW65
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sharon Warnock
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	24/10/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	29	PM	22
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Killeen
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	Non-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 weekdays. It 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 nine 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. The person in charge confirmed that the register provider is 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/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,20,21,22,23,24,27 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 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)

The registered provider ensured that.

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and an adult named as deputies in their absence.
- (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and the person in charge at all times.

(2)

On the day of inspection, five adults were present, the deputy person in charge, four adults who were employed to work directly with the children.

The following vetting information was available for nine adults:

- (a) Twelve written validated references from past employers for eight of the adults.
- (b) six written validated references from reputable sources for one of the adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all nine staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was available for one adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

(4)

Nine of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement

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)

On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(2)

The minimum adult to child ratios were provided on the morning of the unannounced inspection in accordance with the required ratios considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service as outlined below:

At approximately 09:50am

- Busy Bee Room: 1 adult cared for 8 children aged 2.7 to 3.7 years of age.
- Tiny Tots Room: 1 adult cared for 5 children aged 2 to 3 years of age.
- Montessori Room: 2 adults cared for 17 children aged 3 to 4 years of age.

The following adult child ratios were observed at approximately 13:21 pm:

- Busy Bee Room: 1 adult cared for 6 children aged 2.7 to 3.7 years of age.
- Tiny Tots Room: 1 adult cared for 5 children aged 2 to 3 years of age.
- Montessori Room: 2 adults cared for 12 children aged 3 to 4 years of age.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

- (1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-
- (a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and
 - (b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.
- (2) A registered provider-
- (b) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that moves premises on or after 30 June 2016, shall ensure that a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the preschool children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1) (a)
- There were adequate and suitable play equipment and materials available on the premises for the number of children attending the service. All play items and equipment were observed to be well maintained, durable and suitable for the age and stage of development of the children attending.
 - The three care rooms children contained a sufficient number of child sized tables and chairs for tabletop play and eating. Each room had clearly defined interest areas to include sensory play and water play areas, creative corners displaying children’s artwork, reading spaces furnished with cushions and rugs. Role-play sections feature costumes and a small wooden kitchen, supporting imaginative play.
 - Storage units are labelled and stocked with Montessori-style resources such as puzzles, blocks, sorting trays, and practical life tools for fine motor development. A dedicated Nature Table displays seasonal items like pinecones, leaves, and seeds, fostering environmental awareness, while adjacent shelving supports numeracy and literacy through counting materials and art supplies.
 - Science-themed displays, including a skeleton diagram with labelled body parts, complement construction zones with toy bricks and loose parts.
- (b)
- Stackable floor beds were available for the children if they required sleep.

- Rest areas in the form of soft couches and cushions were provided in all preschool rooms.

(2) (b)

- There are two outdoor play areas equipped with age-appropriate resources.
 - **Outdoor Area 1** is an all-weather covered space featuring multiple zones for sensory, creative, and physical play. Key features include a Music Wall with percussion instruments, a Puzzle Area with blocks and foam letters, and a sensory tray with loose parts for tactile exploration. A large chalkboard supports mark-making, while a Water Play Wall with funnels and tubes encourages pouring activities. Additional resources include shelving with manipulatives, foam climbing shapes, a basketball hoop, waterproof aprons, and colourful floor markers for movement games. A cozy corner with cushions provides space for relaxation, creating a stimulating environment for cognitive, physical, and creative development.
 - **Outdoor Area 2** is a larger play space with colourful safety surfacing and resources for physical, sensory, and imaginative play. It includes a Water Area with funnels and pipes, a Mud Kitchen with utensils and digging tools, and a sandpit with construction toys for tactile experiences. A Playhouse offers role-play opportunities with furniture and pretend items, while physical play is supported by spring rockers, a ride-on car, stacked tires, and a caterpillar tunnel for climbing and balance. Seating areas provide space for rest and group activities, creating a safe.

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

- There was a sufficient quantity of play materials for the number of children attending the service which was available on low level shelving and was observed to be easily accessible to the children. Additional resources and equipment were stored in various locations within the service to allow for toy rotation. The materials available for children’s use were reflective of the age and stage of development of children attending. They were developmentally appropriate, challenging and provided opportunities for meaningful play experiences.
- Play items were observed to be made of durable, easy to clean material which was easy to maintain. Large items were secured to prevent the risk of injury by toppling over and there were no hazards observed on the equipment available to children both indoors and outdoors. The equipment was laid out and adequately resourced to allow children to play together in pairs or small groups. Comfortable adult

seating was available in the room. There was an adequate quantity of tables and chairs provided in the service which were suitable for the age and stage of development of the children.

- There was two designated outdoor play area on site which contained a range of equipment and resources that provided for the play, development and movement of children. There was adequate space for children to move around the area and play together in large groups. The equipment was well maintained, developmentally appropriate and safe for use by the children attending the service.

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.

Compliance Information

- All meals and snacks within the service are supplied by the parents each day. All food arrives to the service in the morning in the children’s lunch bag, perishable food is ready to be stored in the fridge.
- The hot meals are reheated by staff onsite. On the day of inspection, an adequate amount of food was available to each child.
- Meals were observed to be nutritious and varied throughout the day. Water was available to children with their meals. Should a child refuse a meal, an alternative is provided from the remaining food within the child’s lunchbox.

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 into the service was found to be secured upon the inspectors’ unannounced arrival to the service. A buzz entry system was provided allowing staff to control access preventing persons entering unauthorised and children from leaving the building unsupervised.
- Materials and resources were maintained in a good state of repair.
- Leads and flexes were secure and inaccessible to the preschool children.
- The staircase was fitted with stair gates so that children could not access the stairs.

- High reach handles were on all the internal doors to stop children exiting the room without staff knowledge.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the preschool children.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall wooden fencing walls and bolted gates.
- Cleaning products were out of reach of children on high shelves.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes.
- Foot operated pedal bins were available within the service for safe disposal of waste.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap and paper towels. older Children were observed to wash their hands with support, before snacks, meals. Child friendly handwashing posters were placed beside the sinks. Handwashing was supervised by the adults to ensure all hands were cleaned effectively.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be ventilated by openable windows and mechanical ventilation.

Administration of Medication:

- Medication was stored and inaccessible to the preschool children.
- Medications examined were within date.

Safe Sleep:

- There were appropriate stackable floor beds available for the children if they required sleep.

Fire Safety:

- The fire assembly point was clearly displayed in the car park of the service.
- Fire evacuation notices were displayed on the walls of the care rooms.
- Emergency evacuation doors were clear of obstruction on the day of the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- (1) In the fenced off swing area the wooden fence panels had exposed sharp edges and an exposed nail. This was accessible to the preschool children and may cause injury.
- (2) In the second outdoor area there was a damaged Wooden Bench. The bench has a hole and cracked wood, creating sharp edges and an exposed nail which may cause injury to a child..
- (3) Broken decorative panel the yellow submarine-themed decorative board is chipped and broken at the edges, leaving sharp points that could cause injury to a children.

Infection Control:

- (4) Children's hands were not routinely washed after nappy changing, posing a risk of cross-infection, and staff were observed leaving aprons on after completing nappy changes, which could cause an infection control risk.

Administration of Medication:

- (5) On discussion with staff, four children were identified to the inspector as requiring an individual care plan. It is acknowledged staff present were aware of each Child's requirements, however no documented care plans were available on the day of inspection. This could lead to risk of delay in appropriate medical treatment being given to a child.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety

- (1) Children's access to the fenced-off swing area was restricted on identification of the hazard. Once the damaged fencing panels were replaced, the children regained access to the area. The damaged fence panels were replaced, and the outdoor risk assessment checklist was updated to include weekly inspection of all fencing to ensure early identification of hazards. All staff have been reminded to report any damage or safety concerns immediately to management.
- (2) The damaged wooden bench was removed from the second outdoor area. The area was checked for any loose nails or debris, and children regained access to the area once all was deemed safe. All staff have been reminded to report any sightings of damaged or broken equipment or outdoor furniture. The bench was removed from the area until the cracked wooden panel has been replaced. The outdoor risk assessment checklist has been updated to identify damage, wear and tear, or hazards such as cracks, splinters, and exposed fixings. In the staff meeting, staff were reminded to report any sightings of hazards immediately to management. Any equipment or furniture that appears to be damaged will be removed from use within the same day.
- (3) Upon identification of the hazard the play area was made inaccessible to the children, once the damaged yellow submarine-themed decorative panel was removed and the new fencing panels were fitted the children regained access to that section of the play area. The outdoor risk assessment checklist was updated to include the inspection of outdoor displays, fixtures, and decorative panels to identify signs of damage, chipping, or wear and tear. All staff have been informed to notify management of hazards identified, which will be responded to appropriately on the same working day.

Infection Control:

(4) Upon identification of the non-compliance, all staff were reminded of the service's nappy changing procedure. Staff were made aware of the need to wash children's hands with soap and warm water after each nappy change and were reminded to remove and dispose of aprons immediately after completing the nappy-changing process. The step-by-step nappy-changing procedure has been updated to highlight the need to wash children's hands with soap and warm water after each nappy change and for staff to dispose of aprons after each nappy change. The updated step-by-step routine is now on display in the nappy changing area.

Administration of Medication:

(5) Following the inspection, individual care plans were completed and documented for all four identified children. Copies of each care plan were placed in the children's individual files and placed on display in the communal kitchen area where relevant medication is stored, and in the children's individual care rooms. All staff were informed of the contents of each care plan, including medical needs, emergency procedures, and location of medication, during the staff meeting. Care plans will be reviewed at least every six months or immediately following any change in a child's medical or care needs, as informed by parents. For all new children attending Little Meadows parents are asked to declare any medical or additional care needs on the child's record form. This will trigger the need to complete an individual care plan before the child begins to attend the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- (1) Photo of new fencing panels Updated, outdoor risk assessment checklist and Staff meeting minute.
- (2) Photo that wooden bench has been removed and only 2 benches remain, Updated outdoor risk assessment checklist and Staff meeting minute.
- (3) Photo of new fencing panels without yellow submarine, updated outdoor risk assessment checklist staff meeting minutes.

Infection Control:

(4) Staff meeting minutes, Step-by-step nappy changing routine photo of routine displayed in the nappy changing area submitted.

Administration of Medication:

(5) 4 care plans photos of care on display in relevant areas staff meeting minute Care plan review checklist Child record form, with section to declare medical care needs.

Summary Comment

Following receipt of the corrective and preventive actions and the evidence received the requirements for this Regulation are met.

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

(3) (a) (b) A daily written record was kept of visitors to the service which the inspector was requested to complete during the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection, the system for recording the arrival and departure of children was not maintained in real-time. At 1:42 p.m., the check-in-out log for the Busy Bees room indicated that three children were still on the premises, although they had departed at 12:30 p.m. Additionally, at 1:37 p.m. in the Montessori room, two children who had left for the day were not yet recorded as having checked out

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) Upon identification of the issue, the attendance records for both the Busy Bees and Montessori rooms were immediately updated to accurately reflect the children's departure times. On the day of the inspection all staff on duty were reminded of the requirement to record arrivals and departures in real-time and the importance of maintaining accurate attendance records to ensure children's safety and supervision. At the staff meeting we reinforced the importance of following the correct sign-in/sign-out system that is in place and that it's the staff's responsibility to maintain the system. The room leader in each room will now monitor attendance

records throughout the day by checking them in 3 intervals throughout the day. Morning, mid-day and evening.

Supporting documentation submitted

(1) Attendance record attached for the day of the inspection. Staff meeting minutes

Summary Comment

Following receipt of the corrective and preventive actions and the evidence received the requirements for this Regulation are met.

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

- During the inspection, staff were observed to be strategically positioned throughout the indoor environment, facilitating continuous visual and auditory supervision. This enabled purposeful engagement with the children while remaining responsive to their individual needs.
- During mealtimes, staff were seated in close proximity to the children, providing appropriate support and supervision, and promoting a calm, inclusive, and socially enriching atmosphere.
- Transitions from indoor to outdoor areas, as well as movement up and down stairs, were managed effectively.
- The outdoor play area was arranged to allow staff to maintain clear lines of sight and sound, thereby ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all children while outdoors.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

- The service demonstrated adequate insurance with a certificate for 55 preschool children availing of a full day care service up until the 27th of March 2026.