

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO046
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Name of Service:	Once Upon a Time Montessori
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Address of Service:	Attyduff, Ballinfull, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F91 YN9V
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Name of Registered Provider:	Georgina Leonard
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	17/07/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	20	PM	14
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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	Not applicable
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Description of service

Once upon a time is a privately run full day care service. The service is located a few kilometres from the village of Grange in North County Sligo. The service is registered for 50 pre-school children as per the Early Years register, ranging from 1 to 6 years of age. This service is registered to provide a Full Day Care and Sessional care for pre-school children. The service also provides a school aged service. The service operates from 08:00 to 18:00 hours. The service operates from an adapted dormer bungalow in the dwelling house of the registered provider. There are three rooms available to the preschool children. Two rooms on the ground floor for senior preschool children. On the first floor is the junior preschool room. There is sanitary accommodation including nappy changing room and a staff toilet. The service also has a large outdoor area adjacent to the dwelling.

Staffing

The service employs four staff members who work directly with the pre-school children. This includes the registered provider, who also works directly with the children.

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 announced/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 9,11,19,23,25,26, and 29; however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 8 and 16. 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, 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.

Non-Compliance Information

On the day of inspection, the service was found to be operating outside of registration status.

1. The service is registered to operate from 08.00-18.00. The service was operating from 7:30-18.00 the register provider was informed of the requirement to notify the early years inspection of any proposed change before the proposed change would take effect.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

This temporary arrangement was put in place solely to support a parent starting a new job. It was provided for a short period and is no longer required. The service hours have now reverted to 8am to 6pm, and this extended service will not be offered again.

Supporting documentation submitted

No evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions submitted. The noncompliance identified under Regulation 8 has been adequately addressed.

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,

(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 a named adult to deputise in their absence.

(2)

On the day of inspection, there was three adults present, the register provider, and two adults who were employed to work directly with the children.

The following vetting information was available for four adults:

- a) Six written validated references from past employers for four of the adults.
- b) Two written validated references from reputable sources for two of the adults.
- c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for four staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(4)

Four 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

Non-Compliance Information

9 (1) (b) On the day of inspection, neither the person in charge (PIC) nor the designated person in charge (DPIC) were present on the premises when the inspector arrived at 09:07 a.m. It is acknowledged that the deputy person in charge arrived at the service at 09:20 a.m.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

This occurred due to unforeseen circumstances involving a family emergency. A staff member arrived as quickly as possible, and to prevent this from happening again, we will ensure that someone remains on the premises until the correct staff member is in place

Supporting documentation submitted

No Evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 9 has 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.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection, there were not an adequate number of adults present for the number of children in attendance. At 09:11 am to 9.20 am one adult was observed working directly with 15 children, ranging in age from 18 months to 4 years and 8 months.

(2) The minimum ratio of adults to children was not always maintained throughout the inspection. This staffing level did not meet the regulatory requirements for adult-to-child ratios between 09.11-09.20 hrs.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

This issue arose due to a family emergency and was resolved as quickly as possible. To help prevent similar situations in the future, another person has been added to our vetting process to provide support if needed.

Supporting documentation submitted

No evidence submitted

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under Regulation 9 (3) has been adequately addressed

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:

(h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis.

(i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis.

Non-Compliance Information

(16) 1

h) Details of each pre-school child's attendance were not maintained daily with actual arrival times. On the day of inspection, children were not signed in upon arrival at the service.

i) A staff roster was in place; however, on the day of inspection, it did not accurately reflect the staff members present. As a result, the roster did not provide a reliable record of staffing arrangements for that day.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. A meeting has been held with all staff to reinforce the importance of maintaining daily attendance records. The staff roster on the day in question was incorrect due to an emergency, and this has been addressed during the meeting. To improve accuracy, one staff member has now been assigned the responsibility of welcoming children each day and ensuring they are signed in correctly.

- A daily staff roster is now in place, and any changes will be updated on the same day to reflect the correct staffing.

Supporting documentation submitted

No evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 16 K has been adequately addressed.

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

- The indoor environment was observed to be comfortable, pleasant, and safe, thoughtfully arranged to meet the needs of all children and adults in the setting. It offered a wide range of developmentally appropriate, challenging, diverse, creative, and enriching experiences for children.
- Materials were freely available and easily accessible, supporting independent exploration and learning. Similarly, the outdoor environment was spacious, pleasant, and was also designed to accommodate the needs of all children and adults. It provided a variety of stimulating and age-appropriate experiences that encouraged physical activity, creativity, and exploration.
- Food for the preschool children was provided from home, and snacks were offered at regular intervals throughout the day. At approximately 11:00 a.m., children were observed eating ham sandwiches, crackers, strawberries, cucumber, grapes, and apples.
- Later in the day, at 2:12 p.m., children were seen eating a variety of main meals, including chicken curry, sausages, pasta, chicken with sweet potatoes, and spaghetti Bolognese. Younger children were given the opportunity to feed themselves, in a manner appropriate to their age and stage of development. Additionally, children's drinks were made available in the main playroom and were within easy reach throughout the session, allowing them to access fluids independently whenever they felt thirsty.

- During meals, the staff members sat at the table and engaged in social conversation with the children, promoting a relaxed atmosphere. The staff members sat at the children's level when feeding the younger children or when assisting the children to feed themselves.
- Children accessed the toilet during the session in accordance with their individual needs. Child friendly hand washing posters were placed in the toilets to promote correct hand washing.
- Nappy changing was conducted regularly and promptly in the baby room and was managed in a positive and sensitive manner; staff members were observed speaking to children during this time and using it as an opportunity for warm one to one interaction.
- Bibs and aprons were available to the children for messy play activities. Spare clothes were available if the children required a change of clothing during the session.
- Children were observed being allowed to self-direct their own play. The children were afforded the opportunity to choose activities daily and to follow through on their choices and change activities if they so wished.
- The staff members demonstrated warmth and sensitivity in their interactions with the children. For example, the staff member in the Baby room communicated positively with the babies using soft and gentle tones, offered reassurance by sitting near them on the floor as they explored and promptly comforted any child if they became upset.
- Children were offered a sense of belonging through the provision of individually named places for their belonging personal belongings and by displays of artwork on the walls.
- Children's language, development and communication skills were supported through the positive interactions an ongoing conversation observed during the session and throughout storytelling, music and nursery rhymes that formed part of their play routine.
- Staff were observed engaging positively with parents during both drop-off and collection times, highlighting the importance of strong parental involvement. Daily communication is maintained through verbal updates and the use of an electronic app, ensuring parents are kept informed and involved in their child's experience at the setting.

Non-Compliance Information

1. On the day of inspection, food was provided from home and reheated by the service. However, it was noted that some children were not supplied with a hot meal from home and instead consumed cold food for their main meal, including items such as cold pasta, cheese, and crackers. This practice does not align

with the service's Healthy Eating Policy, which states that children attending full-day care for more than five hours, one of the two meals must be a hot meal.

2. On the day of inspection, children were observed consuming a variety of foods including doughnuts, brownies, sweets, cookies, chocolate biscuits, and potato crisps. These items were provided from home and do not reflect the healthy food choices promoted in the service's Healthy Eating Policy.
3. During the inspection, some younger children were observed sitting at child-sized tables and chairs that were not suitable for their age or size. Their feet did not touch the ground while seated during mealtimes. Although the registered provider stated that highchairs were available, these were not in use at the time of inspection.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The children's parents have been verbally informed of the service's hot food policy and the importance of providing a nutritious hot meal during the day. As a result, parents are now consistently sending in hot meals for their children.
2. The healthy eating policy has also been reinforced with all parents, highlighting the importance of nutritious food in the crèche.
3. Smaller chairs have been provided for the children, and a highchair is always available for use when needed. Ongoing checks will be carried out to ensure adherence to both the healthy eating and hot meal policies.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of smaller chairs purchased.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 19 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 main entrance was found to be secured on arrival preventing unauthorised access or exit from the premises.
- The staircase was fitted with a low-level handrail for children's use.
- Wooden gates were present in the upstairs hallway to prevent children from accessing the staircase unsupervised. The children were observed to be supervised by adults when using the stairs between the playrooms.
- The toys and play equipment available in the playrooms were appropriate and satisfactory for the age and developmental stage of the children using them.
- Materials were observed to be in a good state of repair.
- Warm running water was available for hand washing at a temperature below 43°C.
- Cleaning products and equipment were stored out of the reach of children.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall wooden fencing and a retractable gate.
- Grapes were observed to be cut in half, reducing the risk of choking to the child.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in both care rooms.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Aprons and gloves were available and observed in use by staff when changing of a child was required.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be mechanical ventilated.
- Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes.

Administration of Medication:

- During discussions, staff members demonstrated awareness of the service's medication policy and the appropriate steps to take if a child in their care became unwell. Medication was administered daily to a child, and staff showed competence and understanding in its administration. Information regarding the medication was communicated to the child's parents via an electronic app, ensuring transparency and ongoing parental engagement. The medication was stored securely and kept out of reach of children, in line with safety protocols.

Safe Sleep:

- Sleep checks were conducted and documented at fifteen-minute intervals. Each record included observations of the child's skin colour, body position, and breathing pattern to ensure their safety and well-being during rest periods.

Fire Safety:

- Fire exits were clear of obstruction.
- An external stairwell was accessible for safe evacuation from the first-floor playroom.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for one staff member. However, this vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
2. The windows in the service did not have restrictors in place. In the ground floor preschool, furniture was placed directly under the window, which was a potential hazard as a child may use this furniture to climb up and out the window.
3. Visibility strips were required on the glass patio doors in the baby room in the event children did not recognise the glass and therefore a potential injury risk. This was brought to the attention of management at the closing meeting on the day of inspection.
4. Two of the spring ride-on bikes in the outdoor play area were found to have visible rust on them, posing a potential safety risk to the children

Infection Control:

5. The hand hygiene and nappy changing procedures for preschool children were not consistently conducted in a manner that mitigated the potential risk of cross-contamination, as observed during the inspection Children's hands were disinfected before and after meals using alcohol-based rubs and wipes. This

practice contradicts the service’s infection control policy, which states that “hand sanitisers or alcohol-based rubs are not a substitute for hand washing if soap and water is available. Children’s hands were not washed after each nappy change, increasing the risk of spreading infection.

6. Children were put directly on the plastic changing table with no mat underneath them.
7. Although foot-operated bins were available in the nappy changing area, staff did not use them. Instead, nappies were disposed of in a bin that was not leak-proof, sealable, or easy to clean. Furthermore, toilet trained children had access to the contents of this bin, posing a significant infection control issue.
8. Children’s snack foods brought from home, which included meat and dairy ingredients, were stored in their bags at room temperature. While some lunches were packed in cooler bags, the day was exceptionally hot, raising concerns about the adequacy of temperature control for perishable items.

Safe Sleep:

9. On the day of inspection, children under the age of 2 years were observed to be sleeping on a stackable bed. These beds are not suitable for children under two years. In accordance with best practice guidance a sleep plan is required for children under 2 years of age that do not sleep in cots. On discussion with staff no sleep plan was available for these children.
10. During the inspection, room temperature readings were taken at various intervals to assess compliance with safe sleep guidelines, which recommend maintaining a temperature between 16°C and 20°C to reduce the risk of overheating. Staff were proactive in their response, opening windows to improve ventilation, removing covers from sleeping children, and conducting constant monitoring to ensure the safety and comfort of the children. However, the temperature did not reduce below the recommend guidance. The recorded temperatures were 22.6°C at 01:01 PM and 22.1°C at 01:28 PM.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. New Garda vetting has been updated.
2. The furniture has been removed, and a staff meeting was held to reinforce the importance of keeping windows clear of obstruction.
3. All artwork will now be displayed on the patio window and door; it had previously been removed to send home with the children.
4. The springers have been de-rusted and repainted

Infection Control:

5. During a staff meeting, the infection control policy was discussed and reinforced with all staff to ensure it is always adhered to.
6. All nappies will be disposed of in enclosed pedal bins, placed away from others and emptied regularly.
7. A mat has been placed on the changing unit for use during nappy changes, and the use of pedal bins will be maintained daily.
8. Children's snacks for those attending sessional days are kept in cooler bags, while snacks for full-day attendees are stored in the fridge. In periods of high temperatures, all snacks will be placed in the fridge to ensure food safety

Safe Sleep:

9. On the day of the inspection, a trial day was held for younger children to assess how they would manage a full day. During the discussion with the inspector, I mistakenly stated that there was no sleep plan for children under two; however, a sleep plan is in place. Cots are provided, and the safe sleep plan is followed for all children under two.
10. Additionally, during warm weather, a temporary sleep room will be arranged downstairs in a cooler classroom to ensure comfort and safety.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photographic evidence of Garda Vetting form.
2. Photographic evidence of furniture removed from area.
3. Photographic evidence of artwork on the windows.
4. Photographic evidence of springers painted.

Infection Control:

5. No evidence submitted.
6. No evidence submitted.
7. Photographic evidence submitted of new nappy mat.
8. No evidence submitted.

Safe Sleep:

9. No evidence submitted.
10. No evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

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

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)

There was one staff member immediately available at all times with first aid for the preschool children.

(2)

(a) There were a first aid boxes stored in easily accessible and clearly labelled in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(b) The first aid boxes were found to be adequately stocked; however, a portion of the materials had expired and were therefore unsuitable for use.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The expired materials have been replaced with new ones, and a checklist has been created to ensure regular monitoring and timely updates of all materials going forward.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of newly purchased first aid supplies has been submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 25 has been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) A procedure was in place to practice and record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated the 12th of June 2025.
 - (b) A record of the number, type, and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service was on file.

Non-Compliance Information

1. (b) At the time of inspection, no documentation was available to confirm that the fire alarm system had undergone its required annual service. The last recorded maintenance date for the firefighting equipment was August 2022, and for the smoke alarms, September 2022.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

All fire detection systems have been checked and are fully operational. Regular maintenance and monitoring will be carried out to ensure continued safety and compliance.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the certificate of maintenance from a reputable fire detection service has been supplied as evidence.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 26 has been adequately addressed.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

- a) The service was maintained in an appropriate and adequate state of repair.
- b) The entrance into the service and the outdoor play area were adequately secured to prevent a child exiting and an unauthorised person entering the premises.
- c) The playrooms were adequately lit, ventilated, and heated.
- d) The premises was maintained in a clean and hygienic condition.
- e) The sanitary facilities were adequate for the needs and requirements of the children attending the service.