

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015TY004
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	Acorn Montessori
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	Garrynatineel, Ballina/Killaloe P.O., Co Tipperary
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<b>Eircode:</b>	V94 C5X9
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Catherine McCormack
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<b>Service type:</b>	Sessional
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<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	07/10/2025
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	12	PM	-
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary, E45A099
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	L McGeeney
<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>	N/A
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### Description of service

This sessional service was established in 2002 to provide care and education to children aged between 2 and 6 years old. The service operates Monday – Friday, 9am – 12pm for 38 weeks of the year. Places are funded under the Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme (ECCE) for eligible children.

The service is operated from a single storey, detached building beside the registered providers residence in a rural area outside the town of Ballina in north Tipperary. The service consists of one large room, one small room, sanitary accommodation areas and two enclosed outdoor play areas.

### Staffing

The registered provider works directly with the children in the service each day, supported by two other members of staff, including one member of staff employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM). All staff hold recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5 or 6 on the national framework of qualifications.

### 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(1)(2)(4), 11(1)(3), 16(1)(3), 19(1)(a), 20(1)(4), 21, 22, 25(1)(2) and 28.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

### Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

## Part III – Management and Staff

### Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

*(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-*

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and*

*(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 person in charge on a daily basis and there was a named person who could deputise as required.

(b) The designated person in charge and her deputy were present for the duration of the inspection. There was a person in charge present in the service at all times while in operation.

(2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that of the three staff employed in the service, all staff members were employed at the time of the previous inspection in November 2023. All three staff files were reviewed as part of the inspection process.

(a) Two written and validated references were available for each staff member working in the service.

(b) Where past employer references were not available, there were references from sources such as previous schools and colleges.

(c) Garda vetting was available on file for each staff member working in the service. Garda vetting had been renewed, in compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting documentation was not required as none of the staff had lived outside of the state for a period of six consecutive months or longer.

(4) Staff employed to work with the pre-school children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5 or 6 on the national framework of qualifications.

### 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) There were 3 staff working directly with 12 children aged between 2 years 11 months and 5 years old on the day of inspection.

(3) The adult to child ratio was 1:4 which was greater than the minimum requirement of 1:11.

### Part IV – Information and Records

#### Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

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

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*

*(g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*

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

*(i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*

*(j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*

*(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

*(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.*

### Compliance Information

(1) The records required to be kept in writing in the service as detailed under parts (a) – (k) of this regulation were available.

(3) The required records were available in the service for inspection by an authorised person.

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

### Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

*(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-*

*(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and*

### Compliance Information

(1)(a) The following was observed on the day of the inspection through direct observation, review of records and discussions with staff:

### Basic needs of the child

The children were supported, encouraged and praised for developing and improving their self-care skills such as caring for their belongings, tidying-up after themselves, using the toilet, washing their hands and dressing for the outdoors.

The children enjoyed freedom of movement and choice of activities throughout the session.

The children had access to their drink bottle throughout the day. Individual bottles were refilled with water when required. Children and staff sat together at a large table for lunchtime, enjoying their meal together in family dining style in a relaxed atmosphere with conversation and laughter.

The children could rest and relax in the library area on the beanbag or on floor mats when they wanted to.

The beneficial adult to child ratio supported the smooth flow of the morning as one staff member could set up and prepare for the next phase while other staff were engaged with the children. For example, one member of staff set up the table for lunch then called two children at a time to wash their hands while the rest of the children were engaged in an activity. Before going home time staff quietly helped children put on their coats and get their bags while a story was being read by another member of staff.

### **Supporting relationships**

The staff were engaged with the children, listened to them, responded to their needs and were respectful of their interests and ideas. Staff joined in with the children's play when invited to do so, such as taking part in imaginative play in the home corner.

Staff were calm and patient in all their interactions with the children, particularly during times of transition. For example, staff alerted the children ahead of time and used visual aids such as timers to prepare them for each transition, such as from work time to tidy up time.

Staff made sure that each child got a turn and was included. For example, each child had a role in the cupcake game. Staff made sure that each child was sitting in a position that enabled them to see the book before they started reading it. When there was a new word in the text, such as 'doze', the reader asked the children what it might mean and then explained the meaning. The children also asked about words they did not understand, for

example one child asked, ‘What’s a farmer?’ which led to them all singing ‘Old MacDonald’. The staff used these teaching moments as they arose to increase the children’s understanding and encourage their curiosity.

### 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.
- (4) Where outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access is provided on the premises of a sessional pre-school service other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, a temporary pre-school service or a pre-school service in a drop-in centre, the registered provider shall ensure that such outdoor space is suitable, safe and secure.

#### Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The children had access to a bright, warm and welcoming room for play, dining and exploration. A second, smaller room was available for small group or one to one activities, for storage and for cleaning up after messy activities. The children had daily access to both indoor and outdoor play opportunities.
- (b) Sleep facilities were not required as the children attended on a sessional basis and all were aged over 2.5 years old. There were cosy areas where the children could rest and relax when they wanted to.
- (4) The children had direct access to two enclosed outdoor play areas. One area had a grass surface and a paved, sheltered area for use in all weathers. The second area was a yard at the back of the registered providers house which had a tarmacadam surface and gates which enclosed it to make a space for the children to ride wheeled vehicles and bicycles.

## 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 service was very well resourced with furniture, toys, materials and equipment suitable to the age and stage of development of the children attending the service. All of the materials, fixtures and fittings in the service were kept clean and in good condition. Materials were returned to their designated place after use creating a clean, ordered and welcoming space that supported the children to care for and respect the materials available to them. Montessori equipment, practical life resources, art materials, imaginative play materials, books, small world toys, puzzles, construction materials, sensory materials and geography and cultural materials were displayed in designated interest areas.

There were tables and chairs for use by both children and staff.

Separate resources were available for outdoor play and stored in appropriate storage units outside.

## 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

The service had a healthy eating policy. Children brought a packed lunch to eat at the lunch break during the morning session. Children brought their own drink bottles of water which they could access at any time they wanted a drink. Water bottles could be refilled from the tap at the sink in the second room of the service when required. Foods eaten on the day of inspection included: sandwiches, rice cakes, pancakes, crackers, wraps, yoghurt, cheese, smoothies, apples, strawberries and blueberries.

## 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 were two staff present on the day of inspection who held current certification as first aid responders (FAR) valid until 15 October 2025. Staff were booked in to attend a refresher on 11 and 12 October 2025.

(2)(a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available on a shelf in the room where it could be easily accessed when required.

(b) The first aid box was available for use if required by a child attending the service.

## Part VI - Safety

### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

### Compliance Information

The service had current insurance cover for a Montessori service catering for up to 22 children at any one time valid until 27 November 2025.