

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY004
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Name of Service:	Acorn Montessori
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Address of Service:	Garrynatineel, Ballina/Killaloe P.O., Co. Tipperary
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Eircode:	V94 C5X9
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Name of Registered Provider:	Catherine McCormack
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	14/11/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	16	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
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Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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

This sessional early years service was established in 2002 to provide care and education to children aged 2 – 6 years. It 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 detached, single storey building beside the registered provider’s residence, which was purpose converted for use as an early years service. The children have access to two activity rooms, sanitary accommodation areas and outdoor play areas.

Staffing

The registered provider works directly with the children in the service on a daily basis, supported by a second member of staff. There is a third member of staff who can be called on to provide relief when required. All staff hold recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5 or 6 on the national qualifications framework.

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(2)(4), 11(1)(3)(8)(c), 19(1)(a), 20(1)(3), 21, 22, 24(1)(3), 25(1)(2) and 26(1)(4).

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

(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

The staff file of the relief member of staff, who had commenced working in the service since the last inspection on 11 May 2021, was reviewed as part of the inspection process.

(2)(a) Not applicable as available references were from sources other than a past employer.

(b) Two written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of the member of staff.

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of the member of staff. Relevant records were held on file.

(d) Not applicable as the member of staff had not lived outside the state.

(4) All staff held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5 or 6 on the national qualifications framework.

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.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) There were 2 staff working directly with 16 children aged between 3 and 5 years on the day of inspection.

(3) The adult/child ratio on the day of inspection was 1:8 which was greater than the minimum requirement of 1:11.

(8)(c) There were at least two staff present when the service was in operation. There was a relief member of staff who could be called on when required.

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 through direct observation, review of records and discussions with staff.

The children were supported to make choices about what they wanted to do during the morning. There were aids such as picture cards to help the children plan their activities for the morning. When each 20-minute play period was ended the children had the choice to stay doing what they were engaged with or to change.

Children were prepared for and responded well to transitions during the day, for example from play to tidy up time to lunchtime. Staff gave the children verbal notice that a transition time was coming and used visual aids such as large sand timers to support smooth transitions.

Staff were observed to be interested and engaged in what the children were doing. They used encouraging and positive language when talking to the children and spent time moving between the different interest areas and joined in the play where appropriate, such as being served a cappuccino in the kitchen area where one child was baking a Christmas cake. Staff were observed to take the lead from the children regarding their interests and topics for discussion and further learning.

There was a lively buzz of activity in the main room throughout the inspection, with children working co-operatively with each other in the various interest areas or enjoying exploring by themselves. The children were taught to respect each other, the environment and the materials, to share, take turns and to use good manners. For example, when the children asked each other for something they said, 'Please may I have...?' Staff checked in with children and asked them 'Are you being nice to each other and kind?' Staff were observed to model the behaviours they encouraged in the children of being respectful, mannerly, softly spoken and thoughtful.

Each child had a drawer with their name on it where they kept their scrapbook of work and photos. The children chose what went into the book and what went home.

Children were supported to be independent with selfcare skills such as using the toilet, washing their hands, dressing for the outdoors, opening their lunch boxes and bags, tidying up after play and eating. Staff supervised the children and helped when required.

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.

(3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-

(a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The children had access to a wide range of activities and opportunities to learn through play and exploration in both indoor and outdoor environments.

(b) There were cosy areas within the main activity room where the children could rest and relax when they wanted to. Floor mats were available for the children to create their own cosy spaces within the main room.

(3)(a) The children had access to two outdoor play areas: one on either side of the premises. The main outdoor play area was directly accessible from the main activity room while the second area, which was used for ride-on vehicles, was located behind the residential house. The main area was enclosed with a brick wall and had a grass surface. This space also had a covered area where the children could play in all weathers. The second area had a tarmacadam surface. Metal gates were used to secure the space when it was used by the children.

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 equipped with good quality furniture, toys, materials and activities. There were wooden chairs and tables that were moved around to create different configurations for various activities, for example, the tables were placed together to create one large table for lunchtime. Open shelving units were child height which allowed the children to see what they wanted to play with and to access it independently. Furniture was used to create separate interest areas which included the reading area, home corner, Montessori area, construction area, small world areas and tabletop activities area. There was a circular table and chairs in the side room where the children could engage in small group activities with a member of staff.

Outdoor equipment and materials included sand and water play tables, tunnel, ride-on toys, push toys, bird houses and feeders, wind and sun catchers, planting areas, balls and outdoor games.

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 and staff brought packed lunches which were eaten together in social dining style around a large table. Food eaten on the day of inspection included: crackers, rolls, rice cakes, cheese, wraps, pasta salad, fromage frais and fruit (mandarins, raspberries, grapes and apples). Children brought their own drinking bottles of water or squash which were refilled with water as required. The children could access their drinking bottles at any time during the session when they wanted a drink.

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

(1) The staff were responsible for recording the arrival and departure times of the children.

(3)(a) Staff managed admission to the service by any visitors or other persons not included under sections (i) – (iv) of this regulation.

(b) A record was maintained of any visitors to the service.

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) Both staff present on the day of inspection held current certification in first aid response (FAR) valid until October 2025.

(2)(a) There was a first aid box on a shelf in the main room where it could easily be accessed when required.

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

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 firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) There was a written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service.

(b) There was a record of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the service. The firefighting equipment was serviced annually, most recently in October 2022, annual servicing for 2023 had been booked. The smoke alarms were checked each month when conducting the fire drill, which was last done on 7 November 2023.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed on the wall in the main room.