

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WH010
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Name of Service:	Little Acorns Montessori
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Address of Service:	C/O St Pauls National School, Lyster Street, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	N37 E973
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Name of Registered Provider:	Carmel O'Neill, Sabrina Campbell
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	29/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	14	PM	NA
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Mullingar, Co Westmeath.
Inspection undertaken by:	C.O' Connor Hughes
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).

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Description of service

This Early Year's Service provides a sessional service operated by private providers. The age range of children enrolled in the service is 2 to 6 years of age. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The service operates from 09:30-12:30 Monday to Friday.

The Early years' service is located in a classroom in St Pauls' National school in the town of Athlone, Co. Westmeath. An outdoor play area is available at the rear of the pre-school room.

Staffing

The two registered providers were working directly with the children on the 29 April 2026. One of the registered providers attended the closing meeting.

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.

Regulation 9- Management and recruitment - (1)(a)(b)(2)(c)

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1) (3)

Regulation 16- Record of a Pre-school service (1)(h)(j)(k)

Regulation 19- Health, welfare and development of child - (1)(a)

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Regulation 20 – Rest and play facilities

Regulation 22- Food and Drink

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 24- Checking in and out and record of attendance (1)(3)(a)(b)(4)

Regulation 25- First aid - (1) (2)(a)(b)

Regulation 26 -Fire safety measures - (1)(a)(b)(4)

Regulation 28 – Insurance

Regulation 32- Complaints (1)

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 providers and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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-

- (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,*

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The designated person in charge and a named person to deputise were available as required.

(b)

The designated person in charge was present for the duration of the inspection.

Following a review of previous inspection findings, information available on inspection and discussion with the designated person in charge it was determined that no new staff members had commenced in the service since the last inspection on the 18 September 2024.

(2)(c)

An in date garda vetting disclosure was available for two adults who required renewal since the last inspection on the 18 September 2024. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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)
An adequate number of adults were working directly with the children.
- (3)
There were fourteen children attending the morning session supervised directly by the two registered providers.

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;*
- (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.*

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (h)
Details of children's daily attendance was documented in the child attendance record book.
- (j)
No medication was recorded as been given since the last inspection on the 18 September 2024.
- (k)

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Four accident and incident records were reviewed. Each accident and incident record had details of the accident/incident and were signed by the children's parents or guardians.

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,

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Children enjoyed the morning activities including free play moving freely from one play activity to another in the pre-school room. Children were encouraged to be independent as they put on their coats for outdoor play. Children choose what activity they wished to participate in and whom they wanted to play with during the extended free play in the outdoor play area supervised by the adults.

At 11:25 children enjoyed their snack time, picnic style, in the outdoor play area supported by the adults. Conversations and interactions were observed as the adults and children interacted positively together during snack time. Children were observed to be engaged in story time, singing songs with rhyming actions and moving to music in the outdoor play area.

Adults were respectful towards children, used individual names and maintained eye contact when speaking to children. Adults were familiar with child and their personalities. Children were content with the adults caring for them. Positive praise was given to children on the completion of activities.

Upon discussion the registered provider informed the inspector that partnership with parents occurs in the following ways: A verbal handover is given on collection. Children's play activities and updates are communicated through a social media application (SMS). Children's artwork is shared with parents regularly during the pre-school term. The child's learning journal depicting the child's play activities are presented to the parents at the end of the pre-school term. The service works closely with the national school as the children attend the school activities including the recent "Fleadh Ceoil". The children also visit the Junior infant's classroom and teacher to familiarise them with attending the national school for the upcoming school term.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

A range of developmentally appropriate experiences to meet children's learning needs was available in the pre-school room. The pre-school room was bright and colourful. Children's artwork was displayed and included the life cycle of a frog. Age and stage appropriate toys and materials were accessible to children on low level shelving. Montessori materials for mathematics, small world, language and cultural opportunities were available to children.

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)

Suitable play equipment was provided indoors and outdoors which included toys and equipment for construction, tabletop activities, arts and crafts and a home corner.

(b)

Comfortable rest areas were provided in the pre-school room.

(4)

The outdoor play area was safe and secure surrounded by high gates. A soft absorbent surface and tarmac surface was noted. Toys and equipment included sand play, a large peg board, a playhouse, a basketball stand, benches, tractors, tricycles and bicycles. A shed was available for the storage of toys and equipment.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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 parents provide healthy snacks for children attending the sessional service. Children enjoyed sandwiches, crackers, a selection of fruit, vegetables and yoghurts with water to drink. Individual water bottles were available for each child. Snacks were stored in the refrigerator in the national school kitchen and brought to the children by a school assistant at snack time.

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 entrance to the national school was secured by high gates and a coded entry system. The school secretary escorted the inspector to the pre-school room. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys, equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival.

Infection Control:

The premises was visually clean. Warm running water, paper hand towels and liquid soap were available for use in the sanitary accommodation. Windows provided natural ventilation in the pre-school room and in the sanitary accommodation. Children washed their hands before the snack and after using the toilet.

Administration of Medication:

Children attending the service did not require any medication. A temperature reducing medication was stored safely inaccessible to children in the pre-school room.

Fire Safety:

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

The fire exit routes from the pre-school room were unobstructed. The fire assembly point was noted in the school playground.

Outing:

The registered provider stated the service does not undertake outings.

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.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.

Compliance Information

(1)

The records of arrival and departure reviewed verified that each child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by a staff member.

(3)(a)(b)

All entry to the service with the exception of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) was approved by a staff member.

(4)

The records were maintained in the service as per the regulatory requirement.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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

(2)(a)

An equipped first aid box was located in the pre-school room.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

There were no adults qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation which posed a risk if a child should require first aid treatment. It is acknowledged that the FAR training had expired on the 13 April 2026 and the registered providers emailed the Early Years Inspector after the inspection stating they will commence FAR training on the 18 May 2026.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered providers have scheduled to commence a FAR training course on the 18 May in Athlone, Co. Westmeath.

The registered providers will ensure that the FAR course will be completed one month prior to its renewal date in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

No documentation submitted.

Summary Comment

Regulatory compliance remains outstanding until the FAR training has been completed. It is acknowledged that the non-compliance will be addressed upon completion of the course. The Registered Providers shall submit the FAR certificates to the Early Years Inspectorate on completion of the training.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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.
- (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)

A written record for the completed monthly fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on the 13 April 2026.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms in the premises were serviced on the 20 May 2025 and on the 1 April 2026.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the corridor of the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was available for review which covered the number of children attending the service and was valid until the 31 August 2026.

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-

- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,*
- (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and*
- (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.*

Compliance Information

(1)

The service's complaints policy was available and reviewed. The relevant details in respect of (a)(b)(c) were noted in the policy.