

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WH054			
Name of Service:	An Gairdin Scoil Montessori			
Address of Service:	49 Greenpark Meadows, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath			
Eircode:	N91 NW21			
Name of Registered Provider:	Bernadette McGillicuddy			
Service type:	Sessional			
Date of Inspection:	30/04/2025			
No of pre-school children:	AM	7	PM	10
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Primary Care Centre Church Avenue Tullamore Co Offaly R35K1W4			
Inspection undertaken by:	A Spain			
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.			

Description of service

An Gairdin Scoil Montessori is a privately run sessional service caring for children in the age range 2 to 6 years. The service operates a morning session for children between the hours of 8.30 and 11.45am and an afternoon session between the hours of 11.55am and 3.00pm. The service is located in a residential housing estate on the outskirts of Mullingar town in Co. Westmeath. Rooms in use include both a playroom attached to the registered provider's residence and an outdoor playroom located in the outdoor play area at the back of the service. Sanitary accommodation is provided for children off the playroom and for staff at first floor level.

Staffing

The registered provider employs two staff members. The registered provider also works directly with children attending the service. A student on work experience placement attends the service in a supernumerary capacity.

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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under:

- Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment,
- Regulation 10 – Policies, procedures etc of pre-school Service,
- Regulation 11 – Staffing levels,

Regulation 15 – Records of pre-school child,
Regulation 19 – Health, welfare and development of child,
Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play,
Regulation 23 – Safeguard health, safety and welfare of child,
Regulation 25 – First aid,
Regulation 26 – Fire safety measures,
Regulation 27 – Supervision,
Regulation 28 – Insurance.

The scope of the inspection included all rooms in use in the service and the outdoor play area.

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 in both sessions 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The service had both a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b)

Both the designated person in charge and a named person to deputise were present in the service on the day of inspection.

(c)

It was observed on inspection that there was a clear management structure in the service. Both the designated person in charge and the named person to deputise were observed to have a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities in relation to meeting the care needs of the children in attendance.

(2)(a)(b)

Two references from past employers were held on file in respect of the registered provider and for one staff member working in the service. A reference from a past employer and a reference from a reputable source was held on file in respect of a second staff member. Two references were held on file in respect of the student on placement in the service.

(b)

A Garda vetting disclosure was held on file in respect of all staff members and the student on work placement. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(c)

Police clearance was held on file in respect of two staff members who had lived outside of the state for over six consecutive months as adults.

(3)

Records confirmed that vetting procedures were conducted prior to appointment of staff to work in the service.

(4)

All staff working in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education varying from level 6 to level 9.

(7)(a)

Records were available to confirm that staff had received and read the policies, policies and statements of the service as specified in schedule 5. Records were also available of staff training on policy reviews as conducted in December 2023 and November 2024.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

Hard copies of the service policies, procedures and statements as specified in Schedule 5 were held in the service for reference purposes.

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 cared for the children on the day of inspection. Two adults were present in the service with seven children on arrival of the inspector and for the duration of the morning sessional service. Three adults cared for ten children in the afternoon sessional service.

(3)
The inspector reviewed the staff roster and the children's attendance records for the week beginning 7 April 2025. Records confirmed that a maximum of 11 children attended the morning sessional service with two adults present daily. A maximum of 10 children attended the afternoon sessional service with 3 staff members present.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child’s registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i)

The inspector reviewed seven child records. Information was available in respect of regulation (1)(a) to (i) in relation to records reviewed.

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 inspector was introduced to the children on arrival and a relaxed atmosphere prevailed for the duration of the inspection. Children were engaged in free play outdoors while staff moved to different groups and individual children to praise and encourage activities. Children were observed to enjoy playing with building blocks on an outdoor table, play with buckets and shovels in the sand box and with small animals in a straw bed container. Insects was a feature theme on the day. A magnifying glass was used by children to search for and find insects which included flies and snails. The theme was used to facilitate open conversation with the children on topics including insects that can and cannot be eaten, honey making bees and colours of ladybirds.

Children were observed to wash their hands under supervision before snack time outdoors seated at low level tables and chairs. The appointed child was observed to be praised for placing plastic plates on the tables for children to sit and enjoy break time. Children were observed to be collectively praised for returning plates to the sink in the playroom and for placing waste paper in a lidded bin. Snacks provided from home included sandwiches, rolls, crackers and fresh fruit, including orange and grape pieces. During both break time and news time in the service, staff were observed to encourage open conversation with the children about home, family members, going to the doctor and birthday activities.

After lunch, children were observed to both sit and engage in conversation with staff and engage in physical activities which included spinning like a spider and jumping like a grasshopper. Music was used for staff and children to sing songs to motions both through English and Irish language.

In addition to the daily handover, an electronic application was used to communicate activities that the children had engaged in and achievements of individual children. A monthly newsletter was also circulated electronically with information on learning themes for the month and general information, including school holidays. The words of songs and poems were included in the monthly newsletters to facilitate an extension of the monthly theme in the home settings. The service also invited parents to come to the service on Fridays at 11.30am and facilitate story time with the 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)

Both the indoor and outdoor play areas were organised into areas of interest, which included learning, practical life, education of the senses, numeracy, literacy and language areas. The range of toys and play equipment included wooden and hard cardboard jigsaws, pegboards, sorting and pouring equipment, nuts and bolts, memory and matching games, shapes and magnetic toys. A variety of arts and crafts materials including paper, colours, paints, stencils and glitter were available.

The outdoor play area was provided with a sand box, buckets and shovels to dig, a mud kitchen with pots and pans and a tool set in the construction area. Swings, slides and a climbing frame were provided. A concrete path outside of the playroom provided a smooth area for bikes, trikes, tractors, prams and shopping trollies.

Flowers and vegetables including radish were in seed in the planting area and the children were observed watering the plants and engaging in conversation with a staff member on what is needed for plants and vegetables to grow.

(b)
Low level tables and chairs were provided both indoors and outdoors for children to engage in tabletop activities. The playroom was provided with a soft low level couch under a colourful open canopy for children to rest as

required. Family pictures decorated the walls in the rest area. Books were provided on an open low level shelf and within easy access in the rest area.

(4)
The outdoor play area consisted of both a grass surfaced area and a smooth concrete area for physical play. The play area was safely and securely fenced in by the back wall of the building, a high level timber fence on both sides and a high-level hedge at the rear of the outdoor area.

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:

Entrance to the service was secured with a high level timber door leading from the gable end of the building to both the outdoor area and the entrance to the playroom in the service. The entrance was secured with a bolt internally to guard against both unauthorised access to the service and unsupervised exit of children. A bell was provided to facilitate late drop off or early collection from the service. Child locks were provided on the presses under worktops used to store cleaning agents and chemicals. Play equipment in use in the service was observed to be in a good state of repair and stored within easy reach of children.

Infection Control:

The wall and floor surfaces in both the playroom and sanitary accommodation were observed to be clean and in a good state of repair and maintenance. Completed cleaning records were held on file for the rooms, sanitary accommodation and play equipment. The childrens sanitary accommodation was provided with thermostatically controlled hot water, liquid soap and disposable paper towels at the wash handbasin adjacent to the toilet. Foot pedal operated bins were provided in the playroom and sanitary accommodation. The openable windows in the playroom and the open outdoor playroom ensured a good supply of both fresh air and ventilation in the service. An under counter refrigerator was provided for the storage of childrens lunches in sealed zip lock labelled bags on arrival of the children.

Administration of Medication:

No medicines were administered to children on the day of inspection. Temperature reducing medication was held in storage in a refrigerator in the adjacent domestic kitchen directly off the playroom.

Fire Safety:

A clear, smooth and unobstructed path led from the outdoor entrance to the service to the fire assembly point outside of both the building and the outdoor play area.

Outing:

The registered provider advised that outings are not currently conducted in 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)
Two staff members had up to date First Aid Responder (FAR) training with expiry dates of 31 May 2025 in the case of one staff member and the 15 April 2026 in the case of the second staff member.

(2)(a)
A first aid box was stored on an open high level shelf in the playroom and an area easily accessible to the staff working in the service.

(b)
The first aid box was available to the adults caring for the children in attendance in the service at all times.

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 record of fire drills as conducted in both sessions monthly was available in the service. The record confirmed that the last monthly fire drill was conducted on 10 April 2025.

(b)

The maintenance record for firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system confirmed that a service was conducted in September 2024.

(4)

A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was posted on the wall in the playroom. The fire assembly point for the service was posted on the wall in the front garden.

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

The group number of children and the staff-to-child ratio allowed for effective supervision of children on the day of inspection. Staff were observed to call the children by their names on arrival to the service and during activities which were based outdoors for the duration of the inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had insurance cover for a maximum of 11 children to attend the morning or afternoon sessional service. Insurance cover was valid from the 28 March 2025 to the 27 March 2026.