

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2016DR017
--------------------------	-------------

<b>Name of Service:</b>	Smart Cookies Montessori
-------------------------	--------------------------

<b>Address of Service:</b>	St Patricks Church Hall, Harbour Road, Dalkey, Co. Dublin
----------------------------	---

<b>Eircode:</b>	A96 D880
-----------------	----------

<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Lisa Mardell
-------------------------------------	--------------

<b>Service type:</b>	Part Time
----------------------	-----------

<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	13/01/2026
----------------------------	------------

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	11	PM	N/A
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	-----

<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	The Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, St John's Road West, Dublin 8.
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	S. Early O'Brien
<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
---------------------------------	-----

### Description of service

Smart Cookies Montessori is a privately owned early years' service which was established in 2014 by the current registered provider. Care and education are provided to children aged two to six years on a part time and sessional basis, and the programme of care is facilitated through a predominantly Montessori based curriculum which is blended with play. The service is located in a residential area in Dalkey, South County Dublin and is open from 08:30 to 13:00 each weekday. The service operates from two adjoining rooms on the first floor of St Patrick's Hall on the grounds of St Patricks Church in Dalkey. An enclosed outdoor play area is available to the rear of the premises.

### Staffing

The service currently employs 3 staff members who work directly with the children in the service, including the registered provider. On the day of inspection, 3 staff members were present including the registered provider.

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

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under the following regulations:

Regulation 9 (1)(a)(b)(2)(3)(4) - Management and recruitment,

Regulation 11 (1)(2) - Staffing levels,  
Regulation 16(1)(h)(i)(j)(k) – Record in Relation to a Pre-School Service,  
Regulation 19 (1)(a) - Health, welfare and development of child,  
Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child,  
Regulation 25 – First Aid,  
Regulation 26 – Fire Safety Measures,  
Regulation 28 – Insurance,

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,

(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.

#### Compliance Information

(1)

(a) The registered provider is the designated person in charge of the service and there is a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The registered provider was present, in charge of the service and present in the service throughout the inspection.

(2)

Upon review of the staff files, it was identified that there was one new staff member employed to work in the service since the last inspection on 26 September 2024. All staff files were reviewed in relation to regulation (9)(2)(c).

(a)(b) Documentation was reviewed in respect of one adult and met regulatory requirements as follows:  
Of the two validated, written references that were required, both were available from a past employer.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were on file and had been obtained for all three staff members, demonstrating that the service adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was required and available for one staff member who had lived outside of the State for a period of more than six months as an adult.

(3)  
The records outlined in regulation 9(2) above were dated prior to the commencement date of employment of the adult in the service.

(4)  
There was documentary evidence available to demonstrate that the staff members held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent.

### 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.*

#### Compliance Information

(1)  
An adequate number of adults were working directly with the children at all times during the inspection.

(2)  
The minimum ratio of adults to children for part-time services was adhered to at all times during the inspection. On the day of inspection there were 11 children attending the service being supervised by 3 adults.

### 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;*
- (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) Children’s attendance was recorded in a hardcopy book with the arrival and departure times of each child recorded daily.
- (i) A staff roster was available and detailed the names of all staff working in the service on the day of inspection.
- (j) There was no evidence of administration of medication to a child.
- (k) Eleven accident and incident records were sampled and reviewed. These were reviewed and found to be completed appropriately with signatures from both staff and parents.

### 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

##### Basic Needs

Children’s care needs were observed to be met promptly on the day of inspection. Staff were observed engaging warmly with children when providing this care. Children were encouraged and supported to be independent including cleaning up after their play, at snack time and with toileting.

Healthy eating was promoted in the service and staff reported that all snacks are provided by the parents for children attending on a part-time basis. On the day of inspection, the children were observed to be eating a snack

comprised of sandwiches, wraps, cheese, crackers and fruit. Children were offered water to drink from their own water bottles. Children were encouraged to feed themselves and staff supported children who needed assistance. Children appeared happy and content within the care room.

### **Supporting Relationships**

Staff demonstrated a good awareness of the needs of each child in their care and responded to children's cues promptly. Staff interacted warmly with the children throughout the inspection and were observed supporting children in their work and play. Staff were observed to use encouragement, gentle tones and praise when promoting positive behaviour. Staff provided an appropriate level of supervision whilst supporting the children's independence during work, play and toileting and mealtimes.

Staff described how they record information about each child's learning and development and how this is shared daily with parents at handover times.

### **Physical and Material Environment**

The Montessori room was laid out to support the children's independence. On the day of inspection children were actively engaged in Montessori work in partnership with the educator and with their peers. The materials were observed to be accessible to the children on low level shelving. Children moved freely around the room and were offered to make their own choices and decisions when choosing tasks and materials to work with. Low level tables and chairs were available in the care rooms.

The care room provided a range of developmentally appropriate play experiences for the children and were adequately resourced with a variety of materials.

On the day of inspection children were observed playing in the enclosed outdoor play area located to the rear of the building. This is a large, natural play space with adequate resources that were age and stage appropriate, and children appeared to enjoy their play experiences in exploring their environment. Children were appropriately dressed for the outdoors, wearing coats, hats and gloves.

### **Programme of Activities**

Children were observed to make choices on their own play materials within the environment. Their learning and development were supported by the staff in the use of open-ended questions. Children appeared to handle transitions between activities naturally. They are familiar with the use of visual cues implemented by the adults to

support them. Children were assigned roles on the day such as helping to distribute water bottles and snack and they were aware of these. Positive language was observed to be used within the staff team and with the children. Children shared their stories and ideas with the adults regularly and these were responded to. Language development was supported in discussions between the adults and the children, and this was observed both in play and 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 door leading into the service was appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The toys and play equipment observed in use by the children in the indoor and outdoor areas on the day of inspection were safe and in good working order.
- The registered provider had taken measures to ensure the indoor and outdoor play environments were safe and free from hazards.
- Medication, which is only administered in an emergency, was stored safely and out of the reach of children.
- Storage facilities for hazardous cleaning materials were inaccessible to children.

##### Infection Control:

- Liquid soap, warm water and paper towels were available to facilitate handwashing for staff and children in the sanitary area adjacent to the care room.
- Good hand-washing practices were observed after toileting, before eating and when returning indoors from play.
- Foot pedal bins were available throughout the service for the safe disposal of used hand towels and other waste products.
- Tables were observed to be cleaned before and after snack time.
- Perishable food items were stored in the refrigerator as required.

##### Administration of Medication:

- The service had an administration of medication policy in place. Medication has not been given to date in the service. An adequate medication record was available to document medication given, should this be required in an emergency. All staff were familiar with the procedures outlined in the medication policy. Anti-febrile medication was available, in date and stored out of the reach of children.

### Fire Safety:

- On the day of inspection, all emergency exits were observed to be clearly identifiable and were not obstructed.

### Outing:

- The registered provider stated that children do not go on outings from 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)  
A person trained in first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. Two staff members hold current FAR certification.

(2)(a)(b)  
A suitably equipped first aid box for children was available and safely stored on the premises.

## 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)

There was evidence of regular fire drills having taken place within the service. The last fire drill took place on 06 January 2026.

(b)

There was a maintenance record of the firefighting equipment and smoke detection system in the premises dated June 2025 and September 2025 respectively.

(4)

There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire, displayed within the Montessori room and the main hallway of the building.

### Part VI - Safety

#### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

#### Compliance Information

The registered provider had a valid certificate of insurance which expires on 24 November 2026 for a part-time service which covers a maximum of 28 children.