

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016LK005
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Name of Service:	Niki O'Connell Montessori School AMI
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Address of Service:	Newtown, Monaleen Road, Castletroy, Co. Limerick
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Eircode:	V94 V211
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Name of Registered Provider:	Niki O'Connell
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Service type:	Part Time
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Date of Inspection:	08/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	42	PM	17
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, 2 nd Floor Estuary House, Henry Street, Limerick.
Inspection undertaken by:	M Riordan
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).

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Description of service

Established in 1998, Niki O'Connell's Montessori School is a private, purpose-built preschool facility focused on delivering early childhood care and education rooted in the Montessori methodology. The service runs a part-time, and a sessional service from Monday through Friday, with operating hours from 8.30 am to 1.30 pm. With a maximum capacity of 45 children, the school maintains a structured environment that supports individualised developmental attention.

Learning is distributed across two dedicated classrooms adapted to specific age groups. Preschool Room 1 accommodates younger children aged two to three years, focusing on foundational discovery, independence, and introductory learning. Preschool Room 2 serves children aged three and older, expanding upon previously acquired skills to facilitate more advanced educational experiences.

Physical development and nature interaction are integrated through two dedicated outdoor environments. A smaller side play area provides a secure, intimate space for focused outdoor activities, while an expansive rear garden offers ample room for energetic play and environmental exploration. This balanced infrastructure supports the core Montessori philosophy by merging structured academic learning with open-ended creative expression and outdoor discovery.

Staffing

The facility is managed by the registered provider who is the owner-manager of the service. She is accompanied by four qualified staff who deliver direct care and instruction to the children. Every staff member has accredited qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education. To enhance the inclusive environment, one staff has attained specialised certification through the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) programme. This advanced training equips the service to implement targeted inclusive strategies, ensuring comprehensive support for children with diverse learning and developmental needs.

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:

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- 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.

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.

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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 designated person in charge of operating the service and was present on the day of the inspection. There was a named person available to deputise in her absence if needed.

(b) During the period of the inspection, the registered provider was present, and the staff roster indicated that this person or her deputy were available on the premises each day.

(2)(a) Two written and validated references from past employers were available for the registered provider and each staff member employed to work at the service.

(b) Where references from past employers were not available, references from reputable sources were on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures received from the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána were available for the registered provider and each staff member employed to work at the service. The service also demonstrated

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compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was not required for any person working at the school.

(4) All adults working at the service held an appropriate qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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) The registered provider ensured an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children at the service.

(2) On the day of the inspection there were 42 preschool children present with 5 adults during the morning session. In the afternoon there were 17 preschool children present with 3 adults. The adult child ratio was correct throughout the duration of the service.

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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:

The service followed a healthy eating policy, encouraging parents to provide nutritious snacks for lunchtime each day. A variety of sandwiches and fruits were observed in the children's lunches. Drinks were removed from children's bags and made accessible throughout the session. For children staying until 1.30 pm, a second snack was provided at midday. Toilets were easily accessible next to both rooms, with handwashing facilities that included hot water, soap, and paper towels. A change of clothes and protective clothing for outdoor play in wet weather were available. Tissues, wipes, and proper waste disposal were provided. The library corner offered soft furnishings for relaxation. Outdoors, children had access to a well-equipped sheltered play areas and a garden for active play.

Supporting Relationships around children.

The service promoted a strong sense of belonging, connectedness, and wellbeing through the development of positive relationships. Staff actively supported children in forming and sustaining meaningful connections by using individualised communication, which included addressing each child by name, and engaging at the child's physical level. Peer relationships were developed through a structured balance of small and large group activities, which successfully fostered cooperation, collaboration, and group cohesion.

Partnerships with parents and guardians were valued and maintained through a structured communication framework. Prior to enrolment, the registered provider conducted individual meetings with prospective families to facilitate facility tours of the school and present school policies. Ongoing parental engagement was sustained through formal parent teacher meetings to track developmental progress, daily informational exchanges during arrival and departure times, and cooperative transition planning for children moving to local primary schools. Furthermore, organisational stability was determined by the long-term retention of the core staff team

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Physical and Material Environment:

The service operated in two large, child-friendly classrooms with child-sized furniture to promote independence. The rooms featured low-level tables for meals and activities, with various educational materials organised by category (e.g., Language, Science, Art). The walls were adorned with educational posters and children's artwork. Outdoors, a secured, fenced play area was equipped with active play structures, such as swings, slides, and see saws. Younger children had access to a sheltered, messy play area designed for imaginative play. Children were given daily opportunities to play outdoors.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

- (a) The premises appeared to be of sound and stable structure. No identification of any building defects were observed on inspection.
- (b) The entrance to the service was secured and all visitor access was managed appropriately. The outdoor areas were safe and secured preventing any unauthorised access to or exit from the area.
- (c) Protective covers were provided on light fittings where required.
- (d) The premises throughout appeared clean with a high standard of operational hygiene noted in all areas of the premises. The premises was rodent proofed with a company employed to inspect the facility on a regular basis.
- (e) Adequate and suitable sanitary accommodations were provided next to both preschool rooms. A nappy changing facility was provided if required.