

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2016LK005		
Name of Service:	Niki O'Connell Montessori School AMI		
Address of Service:	Newtown, Monaleen Road, Castletroy, Co. Limerick		
Eircode:	V94 V211		
Name of Registered Provider:	Niki O'Connell		
Service type:	Part Time		
Date of Inspection:	29/11/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	29	PM 19
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tuala 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).			
Conditions if applicable	Not applicable		

Description of service

Founded in 1998, Niki O'Connell's Montessori School is a private, purpose-built preschool, dedicated to providing early childhood education in a Montessori setting. The school operates on a part-time and sessional basis operating Monday to Friday. The school is open daily from 8:30 AM to 1:30 PM, offering a flexible schedule that caters to the needs of families. The facility has a maximum capacity of 45 children, ensuring a manageable and individualized approach to each child's development.

The school operates from two well-equipped preschool rooms: Preschool Room 1 is designed for younger children, ages 2 to 3 years, where they begin their journey of discovery, independence, and learning.

Preschool Room 2 caters for children aged 3 years and above, this room builds on the skills developed in the earlier years, fostering more advanced learning experiences.

The school places a strong emphasis on outdoor play and exploration. The school features two distinct outdoor areas, a smaller, side play area that offers a cozy space for children to engage in outdoor activities. A larger garden area is located at the rear of the building, offering more expansive space for active play, exploration, and connection with nature. This layout promotes a holistic approach to child development, combining structured educational activities with plenty of time for outdoor play and creative expression, which are core aspects of the Montessori philosophy.

Staffing

Niki O'Connell's Montessori School is overseen by the registered provider, who is both the owner and the manager of the school. In addition to the owner/manager, the school employs 4 other qualified adults who work directly with the children. Each staff member holds appropriate qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education, ensuring that children receive expert care and learning experiences based on the latest practices in early childhood development. One of the staff members has further specialised in inclusivity by completing the LINC programme (Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years), which is a course aimed at improving inclusive practices in the Early Childhood Care and Education sector. This training helps the school provide a welcoming and supportive environment for all children, including those with diverse needs.

Furthermore, all staff engage in ongoing professional development to stay up to date with the latest research and methodologies in early childhood education.

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.

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, 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. All disclosures were dated within the last 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.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children at the service. On the day of the inspection there were 29 preschool children present with 5 adults during the morning session. In the afternoon there were 19 preschool children present with 4 adults. The adult child ratio was correct throughout the day.

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 follows 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 are easily accessible, with handwashing facilities that include hot water, soap, and paper towels. A change of clothes and protective clothing for outdoor play in wet weather are available. Tissues, wipes, and proper waste disposal are provided. The library corner offers soft furnishings for relaxation. Outdoors, children have access to a well-equipped play area and a garden for active play.

Physical and Material Environment: The service operates in two large, child-friendly classrooms with child-sized furniture to promote independence. The rooms feature low-level tables for meals and activities, with various educational materials organized by category (e.g., Language, Science, Art). Children are encouraged to work independently, choosing activities and engaging for extended periods, while staff provide guidance when necessary. The walls are adorned with educational posters and children's artwork. Outdoors, a secure, fenced play area is equipped with active play structures, such as swings, slides, and numerous ride-on toys. Younger children have access to a sheltered, messy play area designed for imaginative play. Children are given daily opportunities to play outdoors.

art 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: A health and safety statement for the premises was available, along with a documented risk assessment to identify potential hazards both indoors and outdoors. Upon arrival, the preschool door was securely locked, and access to the building was controlled by a staff member to prevent unauthorised entry and ensure children were not able to exit unsupervised. The outdoor play areas were safely enclosed with high walls and fences, ensuring children were always supervised while outside. All emergency fire doors remained unobstructed, and safe storage was provided for all cleaning agents.

Infection Control: A high standard of operational hygiene was observed throughout the service. A written cleaning record was available, demonstrating that all areas, both internal and external, were cleaned regularly. Regular handwashing routines were in place, with children reminded to wash their hands after using the toilet, before snacks, and after returning from outdoor play.

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.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) Fire drills take place on a monthly basis. The most recent fire drill took place on the 18th of October 2024.
- (b) All fire extinguishers and smoke alarms were serviced on an annual basis. The most recent check was carried out in October 2024.

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 current insurance certificate which outlined that adequate insurance was available for 46 preschool children to attend the service. The insurance cover commenced on the 28th of March 2024 and expired on the 27th of March 2025.