

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2017MH506
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Name of Service:	Maria's Montessori
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Address of Service:	Starinagh, Collon, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	A92 X5H2
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Name of Registered Provider:	Maria Murphy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	21/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	11	PM	0
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath C15 CP23
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Taaffe
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
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Description of service

Maria's Montessori was established in 2017 and operates as a privately-owned sessional early years service which facilitates eligible pre-school children to avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.00am to 12.00midday each weekday for 38 weeks each year. The service is registered to accommodate a maximum of 13 pre-school children, catering for children from 2 years 8 months of age. School aged children are not accommodated in the service. Maria's Montessori is conducted from two rooms which are operated as one open space with freedom of movement facilitated through an open rectangular arch in place between the two rooms which are attached to the rear of the registered provider's family home. Outdoor play is facilitated in the enclosed play area which is accessed directly from the pre-school room.

Staffing

The registered provider, one staff member who is employed under the Access and Inclusion Model scheme to reduce the adult to child ratio and work directly with a child with additional needs, and one core staff member work in the service on a daily basis.

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. 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 member 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.

(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 the service and a staff member was appointed to deputise in her absence when required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service at 9.25am on the morning of inspection and remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

The staff files for the registered provider and the two staff members were reviewed.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the registered providers and 2 staff members.

(a) Two of the 6 written references reviewed were from past employers.

(b) Four of the 6 written references reviewed were from past employers.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the registered provider and both staff members. However, one of these vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) Not applicable as following a review of the staff files there was no evidence that international police vetting was required for the registered provider or either member of staff.

(4) The registered provider and both staff members held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed to meet the regulatory requirement.

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) During the inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) On the day of inspection the registered provider and 1 staff member were working directly with 11 pre-school children aged 3 years to 4 years 10 months who were all attending the service on a sessional basis.

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) An assessment of compliance of children’s records was carried out. Registration forms were available for all 13 children enrolled in the service as required and each form was appropriately completed as specified in sub-sections (a) to (i) in this regulation.

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 following examples demonstrate how the registered provider supported each child's learning, development and well-being in the service:

Basic needs:

- The atmosphere in the service was warm, welcoming and child centred as evidenced in the registered provider and staff member consistently speaking positively and kindly to and about the children during the inspection. The registered provider and staff member were observed initiating conversations and listening carefully to the children's stories and questions in an interested, engaged and gentle manner. It was observed that throughout the inspection the children appeared relaxed, comfortable and confident in the environment and in their interactions with the registered provider and staff member.
- The service promoted healthy eating and children brought their own healthy packed lunches and water bottles to the service. The registered provider and staff member sat with and chatted to the children at snack time, encouraging conversation and extending interactions. The children were supported to develop knowledge in making nutritious food choices, as evidenced by the discussions heard taking place between the children and adults during the inspection.
- The children's independence was encouraged. For example, children who were able opened their own yogurt and fruit containers at snack time and some children put on and took off their own coats and hats. The registered provider and staff member pre-empted children's difficulties and were on hand if a child needed assistance. The adults were observed to be sensitive and responsive to the children's cues to use the toilet, with supervision and assistance provided when necessary. The children were offered support and affirmation for their involvement in activities and on completion of tasks.
- Soft seating, mats and cushions were provided at the library area to facilitate a child to rest and relax during the session should they wish to do so.
- There was a focus on outdoor play being facilitated in the service as evidenced in the children enthusiastically participating in the "10 at 10" activity at 10.00am in the outdoor play area when the

children were observed engaging in a series of movements including doing jumping jacks, wriggling their hips, rotating ankles, raising their knees and climbing imaginary ropes. This activity was facilitated at this time on a daily basis as detailed in the daily routine on display and in the children's familiarity with the actions. The children engaged in a longer period of outdoor play later in the morning after having their morning snack, dressed appropriately for the cold weather conditions that prevailed on the day of the inspection.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The registered provider and staff member demonstrated high quality interactions with the children in their care as evidenced in the adults' respectful engagement with the children, recognising and valuing their individual preferences, interests and needs. For example, during the inspection the registered provider and staff member were observed to engage children in warm one-to-one interactions and natural reciprocal conversations about their home and family life making reference to their siblings, extended family members and pets by name. The registered provider and staff member were observed acting as play partners with the children which supported the children's participation in their chosen activities. This included occasions when the adults sat having their hair brushed by the children and also when taking on the role of patient in the doctor's surgery during imaginative role play activities observed during the session. On a number of occasions during the session the registered provider and staff member communicated with the children using Lámh vocabulary as well as spoken English and the children responded confidently using both sign and spoken language.
- Children demonstrated a sense of pride in their success and were observed calling on the registered provider and staff member to share their achievements. The adults readily acknowledged and encouraged the children's efforts and accomplishments, focusing on children's actions, interactions and play activities. The children were supported in their choice of activities with moments of joint laughter and shows of affection frequently observed during the inspection. The adults praised the children for kind actions, sharing, taking turns and saying please and thank you.
- The registered provider and staff member were observed working co-operatively and collaboratively during the inspection. This was evidenced in the regular interactions that took place when planning to support the children's needs and when coordinating the implementation of activities, and also in the records maintained of the scheduled monthly staff meetings where curricular and practice issues were discussed.

- Representations of the children, their families and their learning experiences were very visible in the service as evidenced through the broad range of photographs on display. Partnership with parents was demonstrated by the use of a child profile form which gave the registered provider and staff members valuable information about the child's likes, dislikes, daily routine, interests and family before commencing in the service. Emails, telephone calls and a secure smartphone messenger application were amongst the methods used by the registered provider and staff members to communicate regularly with parents in relation to their children's play and learning.

Physical and material environment:

- The pre-school room was laid out in clearly defined interest areas and it was evident that each area had been carefully considered by the registered provider and staff members to ensure they were visually stimulating and inviting for children. The interest areas included a home corner containing wooden kitchen units equipped with real world utensils and appliances, an office area, a doctor's surgery, a farm area, an arts and crafts area, a construction area and a well-resourced library area.
- The children had access to a range of specialist Montessori equipment which was provided on low-level open-fronted shelving units. Playdough, poured pots of paint and kinetic sand were amongst the materials provided to facilitate sensory play opportunities.
- A plentiful range of books were provided to support the children's interest, storytelling and language development. Furthermore, the staff member told the familiar fairy tale of Goldilocks and the Three Bears from memory, using actions and props including bowls, chairs and blankets of various sizes which enhanced the children's interest and engagement and invited their active participation which they seemed to enjoy.
- The hard surfaced outdoor play area which was situated to the front and side of the premises was fully enclosed by fencing and by the walls of the premises. A range of equipment and play materials was provided to support physical activity and facilitate outdoor play experiences. These included a mud kitchen, a wooden playhouse, sand box, wall-mounted blackboards, a crawl-through tunnel and child-sized picnic benches. A locked wooden shed was provided for the storage of additional outdoor equipment including play resources for the kitchen, paint brushes and buckets for water painting, large plastic blocks and plastic balance blocks connected by rope to make stepping stones, all observed in use during the inspection.

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

The following are examples of the measures undertaken by the registered provider and staff members to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the children attending the service:

General Safety:

- The garden gate and the door leading into the early years premises were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The warm water temperature in the sanitary accommodation did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C which reduced the risk of scalding for the children.
- Window blinds were appropriately secured.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely on high shelving out of reach of children.
- A risk assessment was carried out on the outdoor play area daily to ensure that this area was safe and suitable for use.
- The children attending the service may be required to access a second toilet located on the ground floor of the registered provider's family home, based upon demand for the single toilet located in the designated children's sanitary accommodation adjoining the pre-school room. The inspector was informed that children were accompanied by a staff member at all times in the event that they needed to use the second toilet.

Infection Control:

- Running warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels were provided for hand hygiene at the wash hand basin in the sanitary accommodation of the service. The children were gently encouraged and reminded by the registered provider and staff member to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play.
- A refrigerator was used to store the children's snacks which were provided from home. This reduced the risk of bacteria multiplying to levels which could result in food contamination.
- The children's tables were observed to be appropriately cleaned prior to and following the morning snack.

- The premises, play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition and up-to-date cleaning records were maintained.

Administration of Medication:

- An appropriate medication administration record template was available to be used in the event that a child required medication to be administered at the service.

Outings:

- The registered provider stated that the service did not conduct outings.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- In respect of 1 of the 3 adults whose files were reviewed, the service did not demonstrate compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years, as a period in excess of 3 years had lapsed since one of these documents was issued.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective action and preventive action have been undertaken:

Corrective Action

- The registered provider has updated the Garda vetting disclosure.

Preventive Action

- The registered provider will update same every 3 years.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A copy of the updated Garda vetting disclosure dated 12/02/2025.

Summary Comment

The corrective action implemented by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 23.

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) The registered provider and core staff member who are present in the service on a daily basis held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training which ensured that a person with FAR training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.

(2)(a)(b)The first aid box available in the service was suitably equipped and stored in a conspicuous location on the premises and was available for the children in attendance, in the event of an emergency.

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 was available of the monthly fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill was carried out on 10/01/2025.

(b) The fire fighting equipment was certified as having been serviced on 22/11/2024 and the smoke alarms on 20/01/2025.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed in the premises.

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 insurance cover in place for up to 22 pre-school children attending the service on a sessional basis. The in-date policy showed that the service was insured until 27/03/2025.