

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2017MH507 | | |
| Name of Service: | Little Toppers Montessori | | |
| Address of Service: | Bunboggan, Athboy, Co. Meath | | |
| Eircode: | C15 EA44 | | |
| Name of Registered Provider: | Patricia Castles | | |
| Service type: | Sessional | | |
| Date of Inspection: | 01/05/2025 | | |
| No of pre-school children: | AM | 21 | PM 0 |
| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Tusla Early Years Inspectorate, Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath | | |
| Inspection undertaken by: | D. Murray | | |
| 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

Little Toppers Montessori provides a sessional service to children from 2 to 6 years and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme (ECCE). The service operates from 9 to 12 hours Monday to Friday and caters for 22 pre-school children at any one time. A school aged service is provided in the afternoon.

The service is located in a purpose-built building on the grounds of the registered providers home and consists of 1 care room with sanitary facilities. A large well equipped outdoor space is located to the rear of the premises

Staffing

The registered provider employs 2 staff members. All staff were present on the day of inspection.

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/ 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.

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.

(6A) Paragraph (4) shall not apply to an employee of a registered provider where - (a) the registered provider receives funding for the employment of the employee pursuant to a scheme funded by the Minister and known as the Access and Inclusion Model, and (b) the employment of the employee is for the purpose of providing support, pursuant to the scheme referred to in subparagraph (a), for a child attending the service to enable the child to participate in the programme known as the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) funding Programme.”

Compliance Information

- (1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.
- (b) A designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to carry out the inspection.
- (2) Three staff files were reviewed.
- (a)&(b) Six validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the 3 staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting was available for 1 staff member who had resided outside the jurisdictions for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (4) All 3 childcare staff had a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.
- (6) (a) One staff member was employed under the scheme known as the Access and Inclusion Model.

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) The registered providers ensured that an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.
- (3) The correct adult/child ratio was maintained in the service on the day of inspection. There were 3 adults working directly with the 21 children ranging in age from 3 to 5 years.

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 observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

Basic needs:

- The service embraced outdoor play and learning. The outdoor space had areas of interest which supported children's play and curiosity with adequate space for children to play alone and in small and large groups. Children were observed enjoying imaginative, energetic and messy outdoor play with both their peers and staff members. Staff supported children's learning with activities that were observed to be fun and creative. The curriculum was Montessori play bases but also child led with the themes of the month being "Africa", "Spring" and "Summer."

- Children were well supported during snack time and when going to the toilet with gentle reminders regarding hand washing. During activities children were offered choices and sought out the staff members for praise, encouragement and reassurance.
- The children brought their own healthy lunches which they had at 11am. Lots of jovial conversation was heard between the staff and children which created a positive atmosphere for language development and relationship building.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The adult's demonstrated knowledge of the individual care needs of the children. Children were comforted when they became upset with the staff adopting behavioural management strategies such as speaking to the child softly and promoting turn taking and sharing. Challenging behaviour when presented was dealt with in a calm and caring manner and the children responded well to distraction and re-direction.
- The service showed a positive regard towards the families of the children and family links were nurtured in the service with family photographs displayed in the care rooms which gave a sense of identity and belonging.

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-

(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.

(2) A registered provider-

(a) of a full day care service, a part-time day care service, a sessional preschool service or a childminding service that is registered for the first time on or after 30 June 2016, shall ensure that a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the preschool children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(b) Cosy areas consisting of a couch and cushions were available in the care room should a child needed to take a break from activities and rest.

(2)(a) The outdoor space was enclosed by fencing and walls with secure gates. The area was divided into 3 spaces, a tarmacadam surface for ride on toys, a partially sheltered area permitted outdoor play in all types of weather and a grass and wood chip area.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

- The care room had areas of interest with supporting equipment which incorporated natural/sensorial materials, art and crafts and a range of suitable toys.
- The outdoor areas had a goal post, balls, tuff trays, ride on toys, building blocks, plastic and mud kitchens, see saw, white and black boards, wooden activity unit with swings and a slide, climbing frame, balancing planks and a wooden boat containing sand.

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:

- On the day of inspection both the indoor and outdoor environment appeared safe. The registered provider had a clear understanding of her role and range of responsibilities in ensuring the safety, health and welfare of the children attending 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) The service provided evidence that a person had up to date First Aid Responders course and was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)(a) and (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and safely stored in 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) A written record was available of the fire drills completed in the service on a monthly basis.

(b) A record was maintained of the number, type and maintenance record of the fire fighting equipment and mains powered smoke alarms on the premises. The fire fighting equipment was last serviced in September 2024. The mains powered smoke alarms were last serviced on the 20/09/2024.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed on 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 ensured that the service was adequately insured for 22 children at any one time attending the service. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28/03/2025 to the 27/03/2026.