

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2018LH506		
Name of Service:	Playmates Montessori St. Joseph's School		
Address of Service:	The Old Mell School, Mell, Drogheda, Co. Louth		
Eircode:	A92WP76		
Name of Registered Provider:	Jacqueline Walshe		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date(s) of Inspection:	17/10/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	35	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	180-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co Dublin K67 Y5C6		
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle & L Jameson		
Title:	Early Years Inspectors		
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

Playmates Montessori St Joseph's school is a privately owned Early years' service offering sessional early years care and education to children aged 2 to 6 years. The service caters for 36 children participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and operates from 9 am to 12:30 pm Monday to Friday, children attend Room 1 from 9am to 12:30pm and the children attend Room 2 from 9am to 12 midday. The service is located in 2 care rooms in a community building in Drogheda Co Louth and has exclusive use of the building during the operational hours of the service. An enclosed outdoor area is available to the children at the side of the service.

Staffing

The service employs 7 staff members including the registered provider. Two staff members are employed in the service to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary, to work with children with additional needs, in posts funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child.

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, person in charge, 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 service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) The designated person in charge was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced on the morning of the inspection and the registered provider arrived in the service shortly afterwards.

The files for all 7 staff members including the registered provider were reviewed.

(2)(a) &(b) Two written, validated references were available for the registered provider and 6 staff members whose files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the 7 staff members. The Garda vetting records reviewed demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for 1 staff member who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 7 staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with the children in the service including the registered provider held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the minister to be 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.

(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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

- In Room 1, there were 19 children aged 2 years 10 months to 4 years 5 months being cared for by 3 adults. A staff member was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio to support children with additional needs, when necessary, as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.
- In Room 2, there were 16 children aged 2 years 9 months to 4 years 6 months being cared for by 3 adults. A staff member was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio to support children with additional needs, when necessary, as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

(8)(c) Not applicable as the service does not operate single handedly.

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.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) A sampling process was used to review the children's records. All of the 12 sampled registration forms were appropriately completed with the required information as specified in sub-sections (a) to (i) in this regulation.

(3) The children's records were available and open for review by the inspectors as authorised persons.

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 are examples on how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

Basic needs:

- On the inspectors arrival to the service, the children were engaged in meaningful play-based activities in both care rooms. The early years practitioners present joined in with the children's play, providing encouraging and nurturing interactions to children and supporting them to locate and set up materials to extend their play. Children appeared comfortable and confident to make choices about their learning, and the adults were responsive to children's ideas and requests.
- The service promoted healthy eating, and children brought their own healthy packed lunches and drinks to the service. The Early years practitioners chatted with the children during snack time, encouraging conversation and extending interactions. The children's water bottles were freely available on low level tables in the care rooms for the children to take if thirsty.
- The sanitary facilities were located off the main hallway in the building, the children were accompanied to the sanitary accommodation by a staff member who provided discreet support and supervision as needed.
- The layout of the care rooms enabled the children to move around the spaces freely and access the available play materials. The wall displays in the care rooms including family pictures and birthday walls evidenced the value the service placed on the children's home life and helped to reinforce the relationships between the service and the children's families.
- The practitioners were observed to approach children's behaviour in a positive and calm way. There was an emphasis on praise and encouragement to promote positive behaviour.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The early years practitioners demonstrated skilful interaction strategies to support the children's play, learning and development, as evidenced in occasions when the adults acted as a play partners with the children and supported the children's participation in their chosen activities.
- The early years practitioners and children were very familiar with each other, and the children were observed to seek out the practitioners for comfort and support as they required it. Practitioners were observed supporting children to interact positively with each other, helping children to develop social relationships with their peers and to diffuse any minor disputes that arose between the children.
- The children were supported to engage positively with each other and were encouraged to take turns, share resources and work together when participating in activities, the children were afforded regular praise for their participation in activities and on completion of tasks.
- Parents and guardians were observed being welcomed by the practitioners at the children's departure from the service and the opportunity for updating parents and guardians regarding their children's day in the service was taken at this time.

Physical and material environment:

- Throughout the care rooms the play materials and equipment were displayed and readily accessible on low level shelving to promote the children's choice and independence when selecting their play activities. The children in the care rooms demonstrated familiarity with their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- In the 2 care rooms areas of interest were developed including well-resourced home areas with play crockery, cooking utensils, dress up materials, hair care resources, dolls and baby care items, all of which encouraged and enabled the children's imaginary play experiences. Additionally, construction resources, transport toys, arts and crafts materials and a wide range of tabletop resources including jigsaws were available. The services Montessori play philosophy was evident through the provision of practical life, cultural, mathematical and language materials in both care rooms.
- The children's artwork was valued and displayed on the walls of the care rooms and the children's language development was enhanced through the provision of a wide range of books.
- An enclosed outdoor area was located to the side of the service where all the children present on the day of inspection enjoyed time outside. The area was roofed with plastic sheeting which provided shelter from rain and direct sunlight enabling the children to enjoy time outside regardless of the weather.

Sensory play was promoted through the provision of a large sand pit with accessorial toys such as small spades and shovels for the children to use, a gravel area 'the construction area' further enhanced the children's sensory experience along with a large box of soil for the children to use. A well-resourced mud kitchen was provided in addition to a shop area facilitating the children's imaginary play. The children's gross motor play was enhanced through the provision of tyres and balance boards.

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 premises and outdoor play area were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- The water temperature in the sanitary accommodation in the service did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled running warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service. Children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play.
- Pedal operated lidded nappy bins were provided for the disposal of nappies which reduced the risk of cross-infection.
- Perishable items supplied by parents and guardians for the children's morning snack were refrigerated.
- The outdoor sand pit was fitted with a secure lid to prevent contamination by animals and birds.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) The service maintained accurate details of the children's attendance during the inspection. The attendance records were accurately maintained to reflect the children in attendance.

(3)(b) A record was maintained of all visitors to the service. On arrival the Early years inspector was requested to sign into the visitors' book.

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 2 staff members 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 boxes were suitably equipped and easily accessible to the staff and available at all times for the children attending the service.