

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2020DL005
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Name of Service:	Little Acorns Montessori Playschool
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Address of Service:	2 Victoria Villas, St Mary's Road, Bunrana, Bunrana, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F93 X380
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Name of Registered Provider:	Jennifer Grant
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Dates of Inspection:	04/09/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	10	PM	4
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	K Folan
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	Non-applicable
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Description of service

Little Acorns Montessori Playschool is a privately operated early years' service which is situated in Buncrana, Co. Donegal. The service is registered to provide a full day care service for children aged 3 – 6 years of age. This operates weekdays from 08.00 to 13.45 and includes a morning sessional service from 9.15 – 12.15. A registered school age service is also provided.

The preschool operates from a two story, terraced, former domestic dwelling adapted for the provision of an early years' service. The preschool service is provided from two playrooms on the ground floor. In addition, a kitchen, dining room and sanitary accommodation are available on the ground floor. The first floor contains an office, a laundry area, a store area and facilities for the school age service. An outdoor play area is provided at the front of the building which is enclosed by fencing and high hedges.

Staffing

A total of three adults are employed to work directly with the pre-school children. This includes one room leader, one adult is employed to provide support through the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) and one relief staff to cover absences. A manager is employed to oversee the day to day running of the preschool and school age services but does not work directly with the children. The registered provider is available to provide administrative and staffing support.

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9,11,19,23,25,26 and 28; however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 8. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation within this report.

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, person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part II - Registration and Register

Regulation 8 - Notification of change in circumstances

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a temporary pre-school service shall, subject to paragraph (3), notify the Agency in writing of any proposed change in the details in relation to the pre-school service contained in the register pursuant to section 58C(2) of the Act or Regulation 7(2) at least 60 days before it is proposed that the change would take effect.

(1) The service was found to be operating outside of its registration status. The service is registered to provide care for children aged 3-6 years. However, on the day of inspection, a child who had not yet reached the age of 3, was in attendance. An internal Tusla referral was made in relation to the service operating outside of its registered status.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

A change in circumstances form was submitted to Tusla on 10/09/2025
Management will ensure Tusla registration details are up to date.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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*
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.*

(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)

The registered provider ensured that:

- a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
- c) There was a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee.

(2)

On the day of inspection, four adults were present, the person in charge, two adults who were employed to work directly with the children, and the registered provider who attended at 10.30 to facilitate the inspection.

Staff files in respect of five adults were reviewed and the following information was available:

- (a) Seven written and validated references from past employers for five of the adults.
- (b) Three written and validated references from a reputable source for three of the adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for five adults. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(4)
Five of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) 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.

(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)
On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(2)
The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.
On the morning of the inspection two adults cared for 10 children aged between 2 years and 8 months and 4 years and 4 months.

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)(b)

Basic Need

- The service has a healthy eating policy and serves snacks and meals at regular intervals.
- Children bring food from home which is stored in the service.
- Water is available to the children throughout the day.
- Children who required support with toileting were assisted sensitively by the adults.

Supporting relationships

- The adults were observed speaking kindly to the children and displayed familiarity with the children and their families, by discussing home events and special occasions such as birthdays and trips the children had taken. This promoted a sense of identity and belonging for the children.
- Children were free to make their own choices during the session, such as what activity to take part in. One child who was settling into the service, requested to remain in dress up costume for the duration of the morning and this was facilitated and supported by the adults.
- Communication with parents occurred at drop off and pick up times. This time was used for two-way discussion about the children's routine with parents. The manager advised that an application is used to share pictures and updates with parents to facilitate good communication between the service and the child's home.
- A key worker system is in place in the service with adults assigned responsibility for creating close relationships with a designated group of children and their families.
- There was a strong emphasis placed on interactions with adults taking time to engage with each child on a one-to-one basis such as during painting time when the adults acknowledged and praised the children's achievements.

- Kindness, turn taking and sharing were promoted between the children, with the adults promptly using redirection and conflict resolution strategies when minor disagreements occurred between the children.

Non-Compliance Information

Physical and material environment

- The indoor environment did not support the preschool children in initiating and sustaining play activities. The preschool room layout did not adequately meet the needs of the children present due to a lack of clearly defined interest areas and lack of available equipment. For example, during painting time, there was insufficient table space for each of the children to work at. This resulted in some children placing their paper on the floor and on the large windowsill. Minor disagreements between the children in relation to lack of space at the table occurred during this time.
- There was no soft furniture or seating to provide a rest area, should the children require it.
- A limited number of books were present in the room; however, these were stored on high shelving out of the children's reach.
- Some of the equipment in the preschool room was not functioning properly. For example, a play kitchen was missing both the "tap" and all the doors. Equipment that is not working or broken does not provide an enjoyable play experience for children and they do not get the benefit developmentally from these toys that can promote cause and effect rewards.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- Staff have created areas within the preschool room.
- Staff have created a quiet area with soft furnishings.
- Staff have moved books to children's level.
- Management have purchased a new play kitchen and staff have removed any other broken equipment.

Management will do monthly spot checks to ensure the preschool room has areas, quiet area, books at children's levels and no broken equipment.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence submitted

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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 main entrance was found to be secured on arrival preventing unauthorised access or exit from the premises.
- Warm running water was available for hand washing at a temperature below 43°C. in each of the sanitary areas and handwashing sink in the preschool room.
- Cleaning products and equipment were stored out of the reach of children.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall fencing.
- Fire exits were unobstructed.
- Daily risk assesment checklists for the outdoor area were available.

Infection Control:

- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes.
- Foot operated pedal bins were available within the service for safe disposal of waste.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Children were supported to attend to their respiratory hygiene when required.
- Cleaning schedueles were up to date and avaiable to review.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be maintained and clean.
- Perishable food items were safely stored in a refridgerator and the temperature was monitored and recorded daily.

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was administered on the day of the inspection however on discussion, staff demonstrated they were aware of the correct procedure to be carried out to ensure the safe administration of medicine

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- Garda vetting was available for one staff member. However, this vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
- In the outdoor area, a piece of equipment for the mud kitchen was broken exposing a piece of sharp and rusting metal, posing a risk to children.
- In the preschool room, a cover cap was missing from the radiator, exposing a sharp point, posing a risk of injury to children.
- In the sanitary accommodation, a cover was missing from the mechanical ventilation.
- In the second sanitary accommodation, a large accumulation of dust had gathered in the mechanical ventilation, reducing the extraction required as there was no openable window in the toilet area.
- In the preschool room, the metal grill on top of the radiator had become detached, exposing a large accumulation of dust and objects underneath. This posed a risk of injury to the children.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Garda Vetting application was put through and has been returned.
2. Broken equipment removed.
3. New cover cap purchased and installed
4. New cover purchased and installed
5. Vent has been cleaned
6. Metal grill fixed

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Management will check staff records to ensure vetting is carried out.
2. 3. 4. 5. & 6. Management to carry out monthly checks.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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) Three adults in the service were trained in First Aid Responder (FAR). At least one trained member of staff was available to the children at all times.

(2)(a)(b) There was one suitably equipped first aid boxes available in the service. The first aid box was stored in an easily accessible position.

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 record of fire drills was kept by the service with the most recent drill carried out on 21st of May 2025, before the service closed for summer.

(1)(b) Records were available to evidence that the firefighting equipment was last serviced on 11 August 2025 and smoke alarms were serviced 22 April 2025.

(4) Fire evacuation procedures were displayed on the wall in each area of the service.

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 adequate insurance was in place for the preschool service for 45 children up to 27 March 2026.