

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO001
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Name of Service:	Acorn Montessori School
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Address of Service:	Cliffoney National School, Cliffoney, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F91 YC85
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Name of Registered Provider:	Kelley Sweeney Kelly
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	16	PM	N/A
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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:	S. killeen
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).

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Description of service

Acorn Montessori School is a privately owned and operated sessional service in the village of Cliffooney, Co Sligo. The service is registered to open daily from 08:35 to 12:05 hours catering for children aged from 2 to 6 years of age. The service is in a dedicated section of a local primary school. There is one large playroom, a small store area and sanitary facilities. The children have access to an outdoor space with a variety of outdoor play equipment.

Staffing

The service employs four staff members, which includes the registered provider who works in the service daily. All staff work directly with the pre-school children. Additionally, there was one student on placement, one volunteer, and one school-aged employee.

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 9,11,19,23,24,26,28 and 32. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 24 checking in and out and record of attendance.

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, 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) The registered provider ensured that.
- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
 - (b) The person in charge was present at the childcare facility, upon the inspectors unannounced arrival and facilitated the duration of the inspection. The staff roster indicated that either the person in charge or the deputy was consistently available at the service, during operational hours.
- (2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that no new adults had been employed since the previous inspection. On the day of inspection, one student was present on an educational work placement programme and a volunteer. A total of three files were reviewed. In addition, Garda vetting for two staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

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- (a) Five written validated references from past employers for three of the adults were available.
 - (b) One written validated reference from reputable sources for one of the adults were available.
 - (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 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 from the police authorities in another state was available for One adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.
- (4) Evidence of completion of a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister was not required for student or volunteer.

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) There are an adequate number of adults working directly with children attending the preschool service. The following adult to child ratios were observed in the Montessori room during the inspection. Three adults were working directly with 16 children on the morning of the unannounced inspection.
- (3) The minimum ratio of adults to children ratio were provided on the day of the inspection in accordance with the required ratio considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service.

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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
- (b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

Basic Needs:

On arrival to the service, the children were getting ready to go outside with the nice weather. The service had use of well-equipped outdoor areas at the back of the school. There was a range of equipment in the outdoor areas to support play for each age group. Children spent a lot of time outdoors on the day of inspection due to good weather; sun cream and hats were worn by children to protect them from the sun. The food is supplied from home and is in line with the service's healthy eating policy. The registered provider explained that the service implemented a rolling snack as this gives children free range to eat when they feel like it or continue to play. The register provider stated that the rolling snacks promotes independence as children can go to the fridge with staff support and retrieve their lunch when they are hungry. On the day of inspection, children were observed eating rolls, crackers, cheese, yoghurts, strawberries, watermelon, apples, and oranges. Children were provided with cutlery and crockery appropriate to their age and stage of development. Water was available to the children throughout the session. Staff were observed to sit down at the tables and have child-led discussions during snack time, offering support and encouragement when needed. The children were observed to be independent in their toileting needs, with staff providing assistance when required. Children's sanitary accommodation was available adjacent to the pre-school room, facilitating easy access.

PHYSICAL AND MATERIAL ENVIRONMENT:

The service operates from a single room, which is large, bright, and features a dedicated Montessori area equipped with a wide variety of Montessori materials and equipment to support child-led learning. The room was thoughtfully laid out with various resources to create interesting areas of play tailored to the children's age and stage of development. Low-level shelving was provided throughout the room to allow children independent choice over the equipment and materials they played with. These interest areas were well-resourced with

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supportive equipment, providing ample opportunities for children to engage in meaningful play. The designated interest areas included home corners, construction, books, transport, a farm area, and art spaces.

Equipment and resources to support fine motor and cognitive development were easily accessible to children on low-level shelves. Within the playroom, careful consideration was given to ensuring children had access to both open-ended learning materials and sensory items, particularly those engaging sight, touch, and sound. Wall displays and images within the room were carefully curated, relevant to the specific interest areas, and reflective of the children's natural world, home life, and community. Furthermore, access to a wide range of age-appropriate books was where available in the library area. Appropriate rest areas were available with child-sized seating and mats to allow children the opportunity to rest and relax if they wished throughout the day. Children were observed moving freely around the room, and there was sufficient space for them to play together in small groups. Children's sanitary accommodation was located adjacent to the room, facilitating easy and independent access.

Additionally, the service had use of well-equipped outdoor area around at back of the building. The outside area adjacent to the room was equipped with bikes, trikes, a low-level climbing bridge, tyres, and a climbing frame, all specifically chosen to support play and develop coordination, flexibility, and agility at the children's developmental stage.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS:

Staff members were observed interacting warmly with the children, responding appropriately to their verbal and non-verbal cues, and providing meaningful responses. Staff members were quick to respond to children who were observed having minor disagreements; they got down to the child's level and encouraged positive behaviours by saying, "let's use our nice hands," and, "how about we take turns, you use it first and then we will let your friend use it. A strong ethos of teamwork was evident across the setting, and children were observed being allowed to self-direct their own play, having the opportunity to choose activities, follow through on their choices, and change activities if they so wished. Children actively sought out staff members for assistance and comfort when upset, which was always addressed in a caring and positive manner. Staff regularly praised the children for their involvement in activities and upon the completion of tasks, particularly when they offered help to staff or peers, thereby effectively promoting a culture of cooperation and mutual support. To support individual development and to promote positive relationship with the parents, a key working system was in place, with named staff members assigned the responsibility for creating close relationships managing communication with a designated group of children and their parents. Keyworkers were also responsible for completing learning journals for the

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pre-school children. Communication with parents occurs primarily during drop-off and collection times, with a digital application also utilized by the service as an alternative mode of recording and communicating updates to families. Additionally, a large parent information board was displayed inside the room with updates and information for parents.

PROGRAMME OF ACTIVITIES:

Evidence of curriculum planning was available in the Montessori room, with children's artwork and family pictures displayed on the walls. Children had learning journals completed with activities that they had completed throughout the year. Important milestones were documented in the journals, for example, becoming a big brother. Parent involvement was evident throughout the journals, highlighting visits from one of the children's grannies, a father coming to play the guitar, and a visit from the local ambulance service. Furthermore, individual support plans for children who required them were available for review on the day of inspection. On the day of the inspection, the children who were moving on to primary school were going to visit their new classroom and teacher, which is attached to the pre-school. The children had completed "Mo Scéal" transition booklets, where parents and educators documented important information to support the children's new teacher and their overall transition to primary school. Children who will be attending the pre-school in August also visited the service with their parents. Some children who needed additional emotional support had their parents stay and play with them for a portion of the session.

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 arrival to the service the external doors were secure to prevent an unauthorised person entering the service and children from exiting the service unnoticed.
- Internal doors were secured to prevent children accessing unsafe areas and store cupboards containing hazardous objects and materials were secured and out of children's reach.
- Cleaning products used in the service were securely stored so as to be inaccessible to the pre-school children.

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- Risk assessments on indoor and outdoor play areas were completed daily and noted to be maintained up to date. There was no evidence of hazards in the indoor or outdoor areas, toys and play equipment appeared in good repair and all electrical flexes and cables were in good condition and out of children's reach.
- Warm running water was available for hand washing at a temperature below 43°C.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall wooden fencing and a bolted gate to prevent children from exiting unsupervised.

Infection Control:

- There was an adequate number of toilet facilities provided throughout the service to meet the needs of the children in attendance.
- The pre-school room and adjoining sanitary facilities were in a clean and hygienic condition. Up to date cleaning schedules outlining appropriate cleaning methods and the various areas to be cleaned within the playrooms and sanitary accommodation were available.
- Thermostatically controlled water soap and paper towels were available for the children to complete hand-hygiene.
- Staff were observed to support and prompt the children to wash their hands correctly after using the toilet, after messy and outdoor play, and before snack times.
- Foot operated pedal bins were available throughout the service and in the sanitary area.
- Ventilation by openable windows was observed in the sanitary are and Montessori room.
- Staff members were observed cleaning play areas and frequently touched surfaces after children's use and prior to snack time.

Administration of Medication:

- The staff informed the inspector that medications were not generally required to be administered in the service, however there was an adequate administration of medication policy in place, in the event that a child required administration of an anti-febrile medication.

Safe Sleep:

- Appropriate rest areas were available to the children should they want to rest during their session. A designated area featured child-sized soft couches alongside additional soft matting on the ground. The children were observed utilizing both spaces effectively throughout the course of the inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were observed to be unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the room.

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- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible

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.*
- (4) *A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (3)(b) is retained for a period of one year from the date to which it relates.*

Compliance Information

- (1) The service demonstrated that all children are checked in on arrival and checked out on departure. A record of these times is maintained in the service.
- (3) (a) (b) On the day of the inspection, the registered provider authorised entry of the inspector and recorded this visit in the visitors' book. The person in charge confirmed that all visitors and contractors to the premises must be approved by the person in charge.
- (4) The service has a visitors' book which provides a record of all people visiting the service and contact details for same. The registered provider was aware of the requirement to retain the record referred to in paragraph (3)
- (b) For a period of one year.

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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.*
- (2) *The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-*
- (c) *an authorised person.*
- (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 procedure was in place to practice and record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated the 17/06/2026.
- (a) A record of the number, type, and maintenance of firefighting equipment and smoke detection system in the service was on file. Records indicated that the last annual maintenance for the firefighting equipment was dated 01/12/2025.
 - (b) The records for the smoke detection system indicated the last service occurred in 15/12/2025.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) was available and open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (4) On the day of inspection, a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were observed to be displayed in a conspicuous place within 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 adequate insurance was in place for the full day care service for 22 children up until 27/03/2027.

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Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) *A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-*
- (a) *the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,*
 - (b) *the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and*
 - (c) *the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.*
- (2) *A registered provider shall ensure that-*
- (a) *a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and*
 - (b) *the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.*
- (3) *A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-*
- (a) *include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and*
 - (b) *be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) The Service had a complaints policy which outlined the procedures to be followed if somebody wished to make a complaint to the service.
- (b) The complaints policy outlined the steps the service takes to manage any complaints received.
- (c) The complaints policy states how the complainant will be kept informed.
- (2)(a)(b) The registered provider stated that they have received no direct complaints to the service. The registered provider on discussion with the inspectors confirmed the process they would take if they received a complaint to the service in line with the service policy.
- (3)(a)(b) The registered provider confirmed that no complaints had been received directly to the service. The registered provider demonstrated the process followed when a complaint was received.