

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015GY090
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Name of Service:	Punchbowl Creche LTD T/A First Friends Creche
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Address of Service:	36 The Punchbowl, Ennis Road, Gort, Co. Galway
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Eircode:	H91 F985
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Name of Registered Provider:	Michelle Talty
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	30/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	33	PM	30
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulation Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park Hospital, Galway
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Friel
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

Punchbowl Creche LTD, T/A First Friends Creche is a private full day care service which is registered to accommodate children aged from 1 to 6 years of age. Operational hours are from 07:30 to 18:00, Monday to Friday, 51 weeks of the year. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme is facilitated within the opening hours from 09:30 to 12:30, for 38 weeks of the year.

It is located in a residential estate on the outskirts of Gort in Co Galway. It operates from a two-storey detached building which has a ground and first floor. There are two care rooms on the ground floor namely Baby and Toddlers along with three designated sleep rooms, a kitchen and dining area, children and adult sanitary areas. Two care rooms operate on the first floor namely Superheroes and Diggers. Secure outdoor play areas are located at the front and rear of the premises and a car park is available at the front of the service.

Staffing

There are seven staff employed in the service including the registered provider.

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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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

Statutory Notices

Notice	Date Served	Detail
Improvement Notice IN2481	30/06/2026	Four of 7 cot mattresses in Sleep rooms 1 and 2 were found to have gaps between the mattress and the cot of greater than 2.5 centimetres, posing a safety risk to the children.
Status	The registered provider submitted corrective and preventive actions which were accepted and addressed the Statutory Notice.	

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.*

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(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 ensured that there was a designated person in charge and a named person was available as required.

(b) The designated person in charge and named person were on the premises throughout the period of inspection.

(2) One adult had joined the service since the last inspection on 4 October 2024. Therefore, this recruitment file was reviewed. In addition, garda vetting for two existing adults, whose garda vetting required renewal, were also reviewed.

(a) One of the two required written and validated references was from a past employer.

(b) The remaining one of two written and validated references was from a source other than a past employer.

(c) A garda vetting disclosure was available for the new adult employed since the last inspection. In addition, two garda vetting disclosures, which required renewal for two existing staff members, were also on file demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every three years.

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- (d) Overseas police vetting was available for one adult, for whom it was required, who had lived outside the State as an adult for more than six consecutive months.
- (4) A review of the staff file indicated that the adult employed to work directly with the children held a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent at Level 7 or above.

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.*
- (8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-*
- (a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.*

Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider ensured that there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children in attendance.
- (2) The minimum adult to child ratios were met. There were 33 children in attendance with 7 adults in the morning and 30 children in attendance with 7 adults in the afternoon.
- (8)
- (a) The registered provider ensured that there were two adults on the premises while the early years children were present.

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Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

(i) There was no staff roster available detailing staff present on the day, hours worked or break times. In conversation, a staff member stated that no staff roster was in place in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) (i) A new staff roster is now in place detailing the staff working daily in the service, hours worked and break times. Management will ensure that this is completed daily as required.

Supporting documentation submitted

(1) (i) A copy of the staff roster was received in the office of the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 16 (1) (i).

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-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(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.

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Compliance Information

(1)

(a) The Baby, Toddler, Superheroes and Digger care rooms were laid out clearly in divided areas which were equipped with developmentally appropriate play materials, toys and equipment which offered play and learning opportunities for the children attending.

- Tables and chairs, suitable for the age and stage of the children, were available in each care room. Examples included the Toddler room which was supplied with low tables with wooden chairs which enabled the children to put their feet flat on the floor. Tables were positioned to allow children to work individually or in a group in the care rooms. Highchairs were observed at lunch time in the dining area of the kitchen.
- The Baby room had an adult chair available for adults to sit and cuddle and comfort the younger children.
- Vinyl steps and blocks were available in the Toddler room for children to practice their gross motor skills for balancing and coordination.
- There was sufficient space available for each child to explore the environment in each care room.
- Play materials and toys were positioned on low-level shelving in trays and baskets providing easy access and choice while promoting independence.

There were two outdoor play areas in use providing alternative changes of environments for the children; one located at the front of the service and one at the rear. A covered area was available at the rear of the service for the children to play outdoors in all weathers and children were observed playing in these areas throughout the day.

- A range of developmentally appropriate equipment was provided in the fully secure outdoor area at the rear, which was secured with a high block wall, preventing unauthorised adults from being able to enter the area or children leaving the area unsupervised.
- The oil tank was made inaccessible by way of a wooden fencing and a safety surface was in place to prevent injury from falls.
- Children were observed practicing gross motor skills including running, jumping, cycling, steering, balance and coordination on tractors, cars and quadcycles.
- There was various seating arrangements in place for the children to sit and relax. Imaginary play was available from the playhouse and kitchen. Language and literacy development was promoted with visual nursery rhymes with pictures on the walls and children were heard spontaneously singing in the area. An adult in the area was also heard reading stories including "Ten little monkeys" which was

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carried out with the children interacting throughout counting from 1-10 as each monkey fell off the bed.

- The outdoor area at the front where children from the Superheroes and Diggers were playing in the afternoon had opportunities for various types of play including risky play with a beam to walk across and a climbing frame.
- Safety tiles were underfoot preventing injury from any falls.
- Opportunities for imaginary play were available from resources including the playhouses and tricycles and footballs were in use for gross motor skills.
- The area was secured with a high concrete wall and high wooden fencing.

(b) Rest facilities were available on the premises for all the children. On the day of inspection there were 3 sleep rooms in operation namely; sleep rooms 1, 2 and 3. In total there were nine cots available and three stackable beds in the sleep rooms.

- Sleep room 1 was furnished with 5 cots and 3 stackable beds, sleep rooms 2 and 3 had 2 cots. The cots were fitted with a waterproof mattress or waterproof cover.
- Each cot and stackable bed was supplied with a cellular blanket.
- Each care room had a rest/quiet area, with age and stage appropriate soft furnishings, where the children could sit away from noisy activities. These consisted of soft furnishings including sofas, chairs and benches with soft cushions. The Diggers care room had large rest/quiet area where the children were observed playing co-operatively on the floor with coloured plastic construction blocks.
- Children who did not wish to rest were facilitated in the care rooms and in the outdoor play areas.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service promoted healthy eating, with food and snacks provided by both the service and parents/guardians observed being provided at regular intervals throughout the day.

- The service provided breakfast between 7.30 am and 8.30 am consisting of oat and wheat-based cereals and toast. The parents/guardians were responsible for providing morning snacks; these consisted of fruit

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and yogurt and the afternoon snack was provided by the service consisting of bite size pieces of fruit and rice cakes.

- A hot lunch of spaghetti bolognese, which was freshly made in the service that morning, was served in the dining area off the kitchen for the Babies and Toddlers. Staff were on hand to assist the children with spoon feeding as required, yogurt was available after lunch. The dining and kitchen area were separated with wooden fencing and a secure device was fitted to the gate. The Superheroes and Diggers ate in their care rooms upstairs.
- The food was prepared appropriately for each age group with the Babies and Toddler food being mashed.
- Water was available in all care rooms and in the outdoor play areas and was within easy reach of the children. Children in the care room were observed accessing their drinks from individual water bottles which were stored on a shelf nearby, staff were observed refilling the bottles when required.
- Appropriate cutlery and crockery were provided for each age group and staff stated that children who were hungry outside of scheduled mealtimes were accommodated.

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 door was secured on arrival ensuring no unauthorised adult could enter the service or that no child could leave the service unsupervised.
- Safety catches were in place ensuring children could not access unsafe areas.
- Cleaning agents were stored out of reach of the children in each area.
- Blind cords on the windows of the sleep rooms were secured with hooks ensuring they were inaccessible to the children.
- The five highchairs in use were fitted with safety harnesses ensuring the children could not climb out over the top of them or slide under.

Infection Control:

- Windows were open throughout the service allowing for the circulation of fresh air.

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- Nappy changing was carried out in line with the service's nappy changing procedure and nappies were disposed of in pedal operated, lined and lidded bins available in the changing area.
- Sinks and wash hand basins in use by the adults and children were fitted with dispensing soap, dispensing towels and a pedal operated bin to store paper waste. The temperature of the hot water was under the recommended limit of 43°C.
- Handwashing was observed frequently throughout the day including before and after the eating of food, after toileting and coming in from outdoor play.
- Adults were observed sanitising the tables and sweeping the floors after the serving of food ensuring the areas were kept clean and hygienic.
- Dust pans and brushes were stored out of reach of the children.

Administration of Medication:

- Temperature reducing medication was available in its original container and the expiry date was noted as 10/2027. Individual bottles were also available for younger children. These were stored in their original containers and placed out of reach of the children.
- No medication was observed being administered on the day.

Safe Sleep:

- Physical sleep checks were observed to be carried out in the sleep rooms and the sleep check records in use for sleep room 1 and 3 were furnished to the inspector to view. These evidenced that the sleep checks were being carried out every 10 minutes recording the position, colour, breathing, room temperature, comments and practitioner's signature carrying out the sleep check.
- Ambient lighting was noted in each sleep room and the sleep room temperatures were recorded between 18° and 22°C, within the recommended limits for children aged over 12 months.
- Each cot and stackable bed was placed 50 centimetres apart.

Fire Safety:

- In date fire extinguishers were secured on brackets to the walls, ensuring they were available in the event of a fire.
- The fire assembly point was visible in the outdoor area, a safe distance from the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- See Statutory Notice section in relation to Improvement Notice: IN 2481 served.

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1. One cot in Sleep room 1 was placed directly in front of the fire exit door and a second cot in Sleep room 3 was placed under a window and beside a heat source posing a safety risk to the children.
2. The foam on the three outdoor support beams of the covered area had perished, was torn and pieces were missing posing a safety risk to the children in the event of an accident or injury.

Infection Control:

3. There was no system in place for sterilising soothers. The inspector noted 1 soother on the floor of Sleep room 1 and 4 additional soothers lying in cots, posing a risk of infection. It was acknowledged that once this was discussed with the person in charge a sterilising tree was observed in use in the afternoon.
4. Contrary to the cleaning schedule available in the Toddler care room which outlined that the cots were cleaned daily on the week of the 15 of June 2026 and the week beginning 22 of June 2026 two cots in Sleep room 1 were observed to have dust hanging from the corners of the cots, posing a risk of an allergic reaction to the children.
5. There was dust present on the air vent in the upstairs toilet preventing the circulation of fresh air which helps reduce the risk of infectious diseases.
6. The pedals were broken on two tall pedal bins in use in the Diggers care room, posing a risk of cross contamination from the number of children and adults observed lifting the lid with their hands.

Safe Sleep:

7. There was no adult present as required in Sleep room 1 where there were 2 children asleep on stackable beds and 2 children asleep in cots, posing a safety risk to the sleeping children.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

The following statements were received from the registered provider;

General Safety:

1. The cots in Sleep room 1 and Sleep room 3 have been moved to ensure that they are not in front of the fire exit doors, under the window or placed beside the radiator. Management will carry out checks to ensure that cots are suitably positioned to ensure the safety of the sleeping children.
2. The perished foam on the three outdoor support beams of the covered area have been replaced. Staff will review regularly to make sure that they are in good condition and fit for purpose ensuring the safety of the children event of an accident or injury. Staff will check daily and replace as required.

Infection Control:

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3. Staff have been informed of the need to ensure that soothers are sterilised after use. A sterilising system for soothers is now in place daily to prevent the risk of infection. The inspector was shown a sterilising tree by the designated person in charge, suitable for use in the microwave, on the afternoon of inspection which had been reinstated.
4. All cots were cleaned on 1 July 2026 and a new cleaning schedule is in place. A meeting was held with all staff members and cots will be sanitised and cleaned thoroughly after each use.
5. The air vent in the upstairs toilet was cleaned and has been added to the weekly cleaning schedule.
6. The two pedal operated bins have been replaced in the Digger's care room. Staff will check to ensure these are working properly and report any issues as they arise.

Safe Sleep:

7. An adult is now stationed in Sleep room 1 to ensure the safety of the sleeping children. The service policy has been updated to reflect the change in practice.

Supporting documentation submitted

The following documentation and photographic evidence was received in the office of the inspectorate;

General Safety:

1. Photographs of the cots moved in Sleep rooms 1 and 3.
2. Photographs of the new foam on the three beams in the covered outdoor area.

Infection Control:

3. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.
4. Photographs of the newly cleaned cots and a new cleaning schedule for each cot.
5. A photograph of the clean vent.
6. Photographs of the two pedal operated bins in the Diggers care room.

Safe Sleep:

7. A copy of the revised safe sleep policy reflecting the amendment and the statements from the registered provider have been accepted.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider have adequately addressed the non-compliances 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) There were two adults on the premises with current first aid responder (FAR) training. In conversation, it was established that there was a person trained in FAR available while the early years children were on the premises.

(2)
(a) (b) The first aid box was available while the children were on the premises and was stored within easy reach of the adults in the kitchen.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)
(b) There were a number of items missing from the first aid box, compromising the care of the children in the event of an accident, these included:

- Sterile eye pads
- 2 triangular bandages
- 2 medium wound dressings
- Burns Gel
- Sterile water

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statement was received from the registered provider;

(2)
(b) All missing items have been replaced and staff will check regularly and replenish as required.

Supporting documentation submitted

(2)

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(b) Photographs and a video of the replaced supplies from the first aid box. The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 25 (2) (b).

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 firefighting 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) Written records were available of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service. The record of the most recent fire drill was dated 23 June 2026, with previous dates documented as 14 May and 13 April 2026.
- (b) Written records were available detailing the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service the date of serviced was documented as 04 September 2025.
- (4) The notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were visible in the office.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)
- (b) There was no fire detection alarm certificate available on the day of inspection, compromising the safety of the adults and children in the event of an emergency. In conversation, the designated person in charge could not locate it on the premises. It was acknowledged that a fire detection alarm certificate was received in the office of the inspectorate dated 02 July 2026, two days after the inspection.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statement was received from the registered provider;

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(1)

(b) The fire alarm service was carried out and the certificate was submitted.

Supporting documentation submitted

(1)

(b) A copy of the fire alarm certificate dated the 2 July 2026 was received in the office of the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 26 (1) (b).

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

A registered provider shall ensure that the pre-school service is adequately insured.

Compliance Information

Documentation was available to evidence that the registered provider had insurance for the type of service in operation and the number of attending. The expiry date was noted as March 2027.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 30 - Minimum space requirements

(1) Subject to paragraphs (2) to (6), a registered provider shall ensure that adequate clear floor space is available in the premises for the work, play and movement of children attending the pre-school service.

Non-Compliance Information

- There was insufficient space in the dining area for the movement of the 9 children, aged 2 – 3 years old, sitting at the table and the five children in the highchairs aged 12 months to 2 years. The dining room measured 7.471m².

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The following statement was received from the registered provider;

- Only one group now eat in the kitchen with the children in the Toddler care room eating in their care room at lunch times. This ensures that there is adequate space for each child.

Supporting documentation submitted

- The statement from the registered provider has been accepted.

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Summary Comment

The actions taken by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 30.