

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KK045
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Name of Service:	Bluebells Early Years Service
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Address of Service:	Old Sion Road, Middle-Knock, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny
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Eircode:	R94 H323
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Name of Registered Provider:	Lorraine Knowles
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	17/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	27	PM	23
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow.
Inspection undertaken by:	Norma Thornton
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

Bluebells Early Years service is a registered full day care service located on the Old Sion Road in Kilkenny city. The service offers full day, part-time and sessional childcare services for children aged 0 to 6 years.

The service is open from 08:00 to 18:00 hours, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks of the year. The service is comprised of four classrooms, a baby classroom and toddler classroom on the ground floor and pre-school 1 and pre-school 2 classroom on the second floor.

A sleep room, designated kitchen and dining area are also provided on the ground floor with an onsite outdoor play area which can be directly accessed at the back of the building.

Staffing

There are 10 staff employed in the service including the registered provider. All staff working directly with the children held at least a minimum qualification of Level 5 to Level 8 in Early Childhood Care and Education on the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework.

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.

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A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations.

Regulation 15- Record of a Pre-School Child,
Record 16- record in Relation to Pre-School Service,
Regulation 20- Facilities for Rest and Play,
Regulation 22 -Food and Drink,
Regulation 23-Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child,
Regulation 24- Checking In and Out and Record of Attendance,
Regulation 27- Supervision.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the four classrooms and the outdoor play area.

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.

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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)(a) There was a designated person in charge of the service, on the day of inspection. The designated person in charge remained onsite for the duration of the inspection.

(b) A second named person was available to deputise as required. The staff roster demonstrated that at all times either the designated person in charge or a named deputy designated person in charge was onsite in the service while the children were in attendance.

(2) Staff files for ten staff members employed in the service were available for inspection.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available on file for each of the staff members employed in the service, from either a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting certificates were available on file for each staff member, who as part of their role in the service, worked directly with the children or had contact with the children. The registered provider demonstrated

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compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was available for each of three staff members working directly with the children, who had lived outside of the state for a period longer than six months.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available for inspection, for each staff member, who as part of their role were working directly with the children, demonstrating that each staff member held at least a minimum Level 5 to Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education on the national QQI Framework.

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) Throughout the inspection, there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The following adult to child ratios were observed in each of the three preschool classrooms that were in operation during the inspection.

Baby/Wobbler Room –There was 1 staff member directly caring for 4 children aged 1 to 2 years of age throughout the inspection.

Toddler Room- There was 1 staff member directly caring for 5 children aged 2 to 3 years throughout the inspection.

Pre-School Room 1- In the morning there were 9 children aged 3 to 4 years being cared for by 1 staff member for the sessional ECCE service and in the afternoon 7 children remained with 1 staff member.

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Pre-School Room 2- There were 9 children aged 4 to 5 years directly cared for by 1 staff member during the ECCE session and for the remainder of the inspection 7 children remained in the care of that staff member.

The designated person in charge and an additional staff member was available to provide relief for staff breaks and to provide support to the staff in each classroom as required.

(8)(a) On review of the staff roster and in discussion with the staff the inspector was assured that there were always at least two adults on the premises while children were in attendance in the service.

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.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a) to (i) On review of a sample of 12 registration records of pre-school children attending the service, the inspector observed that records of the particulars (a) to (i) were maintained for each child.

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:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

(1) On review of documents available on file in the service, the inspector was assured that a record was maintained in writing by the registered provider of the information required in elements (a) to (k).

(i) A sample of 14 administration of medication records were reviewed by the inspector, and the procedures were observed to have been recorded as having been carried out in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

(k) A sample of 28 accident and incident records were reviewed in relation to minor incidents occurring in the service and were observed to have been recorded and communicated to the individual child's parents as outlined in the service's accident and incident policy.

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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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The inspector observed that each classroom provided children with a physical environment appropriate to their individual and developmental needs. Interest areas comprised of home corners, rest and reading areas, construction areas and art and creativity areas were provided in each classroom. Classrooms were decorated with children's colourful artwork, family and birthday celebration walls connecting children to the familiarity of family in the service as well as maps of community interest points throughout the city of Kilkenny that they identified with.

The outdoor area at the back of the service could be directly accessed via the dining room doors and provided children with space to run around, play imaginatively in the pink playhouse, use the ride on toys and rocking horses for races, build creations from large connective cogs and wooden blocks provided in the outdoor area.

(b) A designated sleep room with three standard cots for children aged 1 to 2 years was provided on the ground floor. The sleep room was dimmed with a black out curtain, ventilated naturally with two open top windows and maintained at the recommended room temperature of 18°C to 22°C for children over a year of age. A supply of stackable beds was available for children aged over two years which were placed in the toddler room for any children who wished to take a nap while attending the service. Children who did not wish to nap moved to one of the other three preschool rooms for activities with the adult to child ratios maintained as required by schedule 6 of regulation 11.

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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

A three-week menu plan was in place in the service in line with the service's healthy eating policy. Children were provided with a selection of wheat and rice-based cereals and fresh toast for breakfast in the mornings, where children arrived early to the service.

Snacks provided in the service included fresh fruit slices, such as bananas, pears, apples and orange segments, vegetable sticks such as carrot and cucumber, cheese cubes, hummus, crackers, breadsticks or rice cakes.

On the day of inspection snack served comprised of brown bread, homemade jam, apple slices and yogurts.

Children attending the sessional service bought their own snacks in line with the service's healthy eating policy.

Children enjoyed their main meals in the designated dining area adjacent to the kitchen, younger children sat in highchairs with comfortable padded cushions and footrests while the older children sat at round tables on age-appropriate wooden chairs. The main meal was observed to have been cooked in the service and comprised of pasta, chicken pieces and hidden vegetables which included pureed courgettes, onions, peas and sweetcorn.

Other dishes in the three-week menu plan included chicken casserole and mash, chicken supreme with boiled rice, shepherd's pie, burgers, mash and beans, spaghetti bolognese with hidden vegetables and roast chicken, potato mash and vegetables.

Evening snack included bread sticks and chilled melon to refresh the children on the warm day, while other options on the menu included homemade soups served with crusty breads, fish fingers, beans on toast, pesto pasta and garlic bread, scrambled egg on toast, homemade pizzas, toasted sandwiches and fruit and on Friday evenings as a treat chicken goujons and chips.

At each snack time or meal children were provided with the option of milk or water. Each classroom had a designated drinks station where children could easily access their drinking bottles or be provided with a glass of fresh drinking water.

On the warm afternoon of the inspection after the children had enjoyed their main meal, they were provided with a natural juice homemade ice lolly.

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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 service was secured with a call bell system and access to the service could only be authorised by the staff upon responding to the doorbell. The main entrance door was secured internally and any visitors to the service could be observed through the large glass windows and glass porch at the front of the premises. This assisted in reducing the risk of any unauthorised persons accessing the service and reduced the risk of a child leaving the service unsupervised.

The outdoor play area at the back of the premises was adequately secured with a locked wooden side gate and a 12-foot-high concrete wall.

The inspector observed that staff ensured that all cleaning equipment and materials were stored in a safe secure area in accessible to the children.

Infection Control:

There were an adequate number of toilets and a nappy changing facility provided in the service to meet the needs of the children attending the service.

Handwash basins were adequately supplied with liquid hand soap and paper towelling, which the children could easily access and use.

The older children were observed to use the toilet and hand-washing facilities on the first floor, independently, while staff supported and assisted the younger children in the wobbler and toddler rooms as needed.

Staff were observed to support and prompt the children to wash their hands correctly after using the toilet, after nappy-changing, after messy and outdoor play, and before snack times.

Administration of Medication:

In discussion with staff and on observation of an administration of medication procedure on the day of inspection, the inspector was assured that staff were well informed of the procedures to follow for the administration of any prescribed, emergency or anti-febrile medication in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

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Safe Sleep:

On observation of sleep practices in the service the inspector observed that staff responded to the needs of individual children's sleep requirements ensuring that children were provided with opportunities to sleep at times when children demonstrated cues for the need to sleep.

Staff were gentle and patient settling and comforting children to settle to sleep ensuring they were comfortable in the sleep environment provided and checking the sleeping child's breathing, sleep position and colour every ten minutes and recording the findings.

Outing:

The service had an adequate outings policy in place for the safe execution of any planned outings for the pre-school children away from the service. The inspector observed the staff implement the service's outings policy on the day of inspection as they organised a nature walk through the natural wooded area on the grounds of St. Canice's hospital directly opposite the childcare service.

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.

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Compliance Information

- (1) On review of records the inspector was assured that each pre-school child's daily attendance and departure times to and from the service were recorded daily. On review of the attendance records the number of children present in the service correlated with the attendance records maintained by the staff in each of the four classrooms.
- (3)(a) The inspector observed that no person other than a child attending the service, a parent/ guardian dropping or collecting a child, an employee or unpaid worker could enter the premises without authorisation by the registered provider or an employee.
- (b) The inspector observed that a daily record of any visitors to the service was maintained and detailed the name, contact details, purpose of visit and times of entry and exit from the service. The inspector was required to record the details in the record book upon arriving at the service.
- (4) The inspector observed that a visitor record had been maintained for greater than one year prior to the date of inspection.

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 three staff members employed in the service with current certification in the required first aid responder (FAR) training. At all times while the service was operating, there was at least two staff members with FAR training present. This was reflected in the staff roster reviewed by the inspector on the day of inspection.
- (2)(a)(b) There was first aid cabinet located in the kitchen which was easily accessed by all staff and always available.
- The first aid contents stored in the cabinet were adequate, and records demonstrated that the first aid contents were checked monthly and replaced if necessary.

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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-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation
- (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) The following fire safety records were maintained
- (a) There was a written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 26 May 2026.
 - (b) A written record was maintained of the maintenance of fire-fighting equipment and the smoke alarm system in the service. The last maintenance check of fire-fighting equipment was recorded as having taken place in June 2026 and for the fire alarm system was recorded as having taken place on the 08 May 2026.
- (2) The fire safety records were available and open for inspection by the early years inspector or by a parent / employee on request.
- (3) The designated person in charge demonstrated that records were maintained for the five years prior to inspection.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed on the notice board in the main entrance hall.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The staff in the service ensured that all children were appropriately always supervised throughout the inspection. All staff were suitably qualified and had extensive experience as some staff had over 20 years experience working directly with children. The child staff ratios exceeded the requirements for care needed under the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

These ratios were not compromised as the designated person in charge and an additional relief staff member were present and available to support staff for relief for breaks and with care of the children.

During mealtimes staff were observed to sit at the tables with the children especially the younger children encouraging them to eat and drink their food.

Physical 10-minute checks were observed being carried out on sleeping children, sound monitors were used to increase the supervision. Children in the toddler and preschool classrooms were encouraged to use the toilet facilities independently and staff stood within hearing range on the corridor while children used the toilets.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was displayed on the notice board in the entrance hall of the service, detailing that adequate insurance was in place for a full day childcare service for up to a maximum number of 31 early years children. The insurance certificate applied to the period from 28 March 2026 to 27 March 2027.