

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LK015
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Name of Service:	Dromin & Athlacca Community Childcare Ltd
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Address of Service:	Rathcannon, Athlacca, Kilmallock, Co. Limerick
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Eircode:	V35 VY06
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Name of Registered Provider:	Karen Hopkins
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	04/06/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	22	PM	15
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla, Early Years Inspectorate Offices, 2 nd Floor, Estuary House, Henry Street, Limerick.
Inspection undertaken by:	M Riordan
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

Star Kids Pre-School is a community based childcare service providing sessional, part-time, and full-day care within the rural locality of Athlacca, County Limerick. Conveniently situated adjacent to the local primary school, the service operates a morning sessional programme, alongside extended full day care from 7.30 am to 2.45 pm. Additionally, a dedicated school-age service operates each afternoon to support families within the community. The facility comprises a purpose-built, single-story structure designed specifically for early years education. Inside, the premises features two spacious preschool rooms equipped with integrated bathroom facilities, a kitchen, a dedicated storage room, and an accessible disability toilet. Externally, children benefit from a well-resourced, fully enclosed outdoor play area spanning the side and rear of the building. Positioned at the rear of this outdoor space is a modular building utilised as a specialised sensory room, which also accommodates the school-age programme each evening.

Staffing

The registered provider of the service is the chairperson of the Dromin Athlacca Community Childcare Committee. A designated person in charge is appointed to oversee the daily running of the pre-school. There are 4 additional staff employed to work at the service. All staff hold an appropriate qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education. A person assigned to assist with clerical duties is also working at the facility.

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

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- 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.

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, 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

(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 designated person in charge of operating the service was in charge on the day of the inspection. There was a named person available who was able to deputise if required.

(b) During the period of the inspection, a designated person in charge was present and the staff roster indicated a person in charge was on duty each day.

(2)(a) Two written and validated references from past employers were available for all staff at the facility.

(b) All references were from past employers or from other reputable sources.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures received from the National Vetting Bureau of An Garda Síochána were available for each staff member. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was available for 1 staff member at the service.

(4) All staff working with children held the required qualifications in Early Childhood Care and Education.

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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) The service operates a morning session from 9.15am to 12.15pm. On the day of the inspection there were 22 pre-school children present with 3 staff members. In the afternoon there were 15 preschool children present with 2 staff members. The adult child ratio was compliant with the requirements of Regulation 11.
- (2) At all times the manager at the service ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to in the service.

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

BASIC NEEDS:

The service maintained a comprehensive Healthy Eating policy. Children arriving early received a breakfast of toast, cereals, fresh fruit, and yogurts, while parents provided a mid-morning snack at 10:30 am. Management guided families on nutritious options for lunchboxes, and staff stored all perishable foods in a refrigerator. Children staying for the afternoon were offered a second nutritious snack of either sandwiches, fruit, yogurts,

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pasta dishes or rice plates in the early afternoon. Staff sat with the children during breaks to foster a social mealtime environment.

Children had unrestricted access to toilets located next to preschool room 2. The facility promoted independent hygiene with easily accessible sinks, hot water, liquid soap, and paper hand towels provided. A disability accessible bathroom and a nappy-changing amenity were also available if required.

To support rest, a large soft couch provided a quiet space away from active play. Additionally, the outdoor cabin served as a relaxed sensory space. This calm environment featured low lighting, soft music, sensory lamps, and large couches for children needing quiet time.

The daily routine prioritised extensive outdoor play. A large canopy extending from the building provided a sheltered space, enabling children to play outside regardless of the weather. Staff kept a change of clothes and protective gear accessible for messy play activities.

The well-resourced outdoor area offered diverse opportunities for active play, adventure, and nature exploration. It featured dedicated zones for climbing, running, ball games, imaginative play, sensory play, gardening, digging, and cycling.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIPS AROUND CHILDREN.

Relationships at the service effectively supported a sense of belonging, connectedness, and well-being for all children. Staff facilitated informal information exchanges with families daily, during morning drop-off and evening collection times. Upon enrolment, management provided a comprehensive parent handbook detailing operational guidelines and service policies. Prior to commencement, the service provider met individually with each parent, and children attended introductory orientation visits, to familiarise themselves with the environment. Regular communication continued throughout each term, supplemented by extensive photographic updates shared electronically with parents and guardians.

The service actively promoted family engagement through targeted seasonal events. Mothers and grandmothers were invited to the facility for afternoon tea, while fathers and male relatives participated in a dedicated sports day, followed by a barbeque. Furthermore, management maintained well-established community links, which included organising a recent educational visit from a search and rescue helicopter.

To support positive transitions, staff displayed detailed photographic posters, chronicling the life of each child within the preschool. The service subsequently forwarded these displays to the local primary school to help teachers understand each child's background. Additionally, teachers and principals from the local primary schools visited the service to share afternoon tea with the children before their formal primary school enrolment.

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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 3 staff members working at the service that had the required first aid responder training course completed. All certificates were in date up to the 25th of November 2026.

(2)(a) A first aid box stocked with all the necessary materials was stored in an easily accessible location in the preschool.

(b) The first aid box was at all times available to the children at the service. The box located in the outdoor cabin was easily accessible to the children while playing in the outdoor areas.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) Records were available to show that fire drills were carried out monthly. The most recent fire drill took place on the 27th of May 2026.

(b) A record of the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment was available on the premises with the most recent service having been completed on the 21st of May 2026. All smoke alarms were serviced on the 27th of February 2026.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider had a current insurance certificate which outlined that adequate insurance was available for a maximum of 30 preschool children to attend the service for a full day care preschool service.