

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY076
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Name of Service:	The Owl and The Pussycat Day Care and Afterschool Club
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Address of Service:	Cullinagh, Ballina, Co Tipperary
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Eircode:	V94 K28F
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Name of Registered Provider:	Crona Byrne
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	28/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	45	PM	43
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary, E45A099
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney and A McNamara
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

This full day care service was established to provide care and education to children aged between 0 and 6 years old. A registered school age care service is also provided. The service operates Monday – Friday, 8am – 6.15pm for 51 weeks of the year. This includes a daily three-hour session funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children which operates Monday – Friday, 9am – 12pm for 38 weeks of the year.

The service is operated from the ground floor of a detached, two-storey building in the village of Ballina in north Tipperary. The entire ground floor has been developed for use as an early years service while the first floor of the building is not part of the service and consists of residential units. The service consists of a kitchen, staff room, office, entrance lobby, sleep room, sanitary accommodation areas and six activity rooms. The front of the premises has been developed into a car parking area and the back of the premises has an enclosed outdoor play area for the children.

Little Owls Naionra, also located in Ballina, is operated by the same registered provider.

Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service on a daily basis but is available to be contacted as required. The service manager or her deputy are the persons in charge on a daily basis. There are a total of fourteen staff employed to care for the children in the early years service. Additional staff are employed to work with the school age children. Ancillary staff include staff responsible for administration, bus driving, maintenance, housekeeping, catering and general assistance. The service supports childcare and secondary school students to undertake work experience in the service.

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:

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- 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(1)(2)(4), 11(1)(2), 16(1)(3), 19(1)(a), 22, 23 and 24.

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 person in charge, 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)(a) There was a designated person in charge and a named deputy who was able to deputise, as required.

(b) A person in charge was present on the day of inspection. From a review of the rosters a person in charge was present daily.

(2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the deputy person in charge it was determined that four students and seven new staff members had been employed since the previous inspection. A total of 11 files were reviewed. In addition, Garda vetting for 13 staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

(2)(a) Two written and validated references were available for each person working at the service.

(b) Where past employer references were not available, there were references from sources such as previous schools and colleges.

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- (c) Garda vetting was available on file for everyone working in the service. In the case of two staff members, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under Regulation 23 of this report.
- (d) Not applicable. Review of the curriculum vitae indicated that police vetting was not required.
- (4) Staff employed to work directly with the children in the early years service held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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) There were adequate staffing levels to respond to the children's needs on the day of inspection.
- (2) The adult to child ratios during the day of inspection met the requirements of the regulations as follows:
- Baby room: Three children aged between 7 and 12 months old and three children aged between 12 and 18 months old were cared for by two staff members.
 - Wobbler room: Four children aged between 18 months and 2 years old and six children aged between 2 and 2.5 years old were cared for by two staff members.
 - Play School: Ten children aged between 2 and 3 years old were cared for by one staff member.
 - Pre ECCE: Two children aged between 2.5 and 3 years old and seven children aged between 3 and 4 years old were cared for by one staff member.
 - ECCE: Ten children aged between 3 and 5 years old were cared for by two staff members.

Students on work experience were working in the service but not included in the adult to child ratios as they were present in a supernumerary capacity. Other staff, not directly involved in caring for the children such as catering, cleaning and maintenance staff were not included in the adult to child ratios.

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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:

- (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.*

(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

Compliance Information

(1) The information required under parts (a) to (k) of this regulation were available on the premises in paper format.

(3) The required records were available on the premises and open to inspection by an authorised person.

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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

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The following was observed on the day of inspection through direct observation, discussions with staff and review of records:

Basic needs:

The children enjoyed freedom of movement both indoors and outdoors. Children were brought outside to play several times during the day.

The children had their own drinking cups or water bottles that they could access during the day when they wanted a drink. Drink bottles and cups were refilled with water when empty.

The children who wanted to sleep during the day were facilitated to do so according to their own sleep needs and schedules. There were sufficient cots in the sleep room for the children aged under 2 years old to use during sleep times. There were camp beds available for older children to sleep on. These were placed on the floor in the Wobbler and Toddler rooms after dinnertime for the children to use.

Supporting relationships

The children were cared for by the same team of staff each day which allowed the staff to know and understand each child's needs, interests and abilities and to provide them with opportunities to play and learn based on their emergent interests.

The staff were observed to be engaged with the children, to support them in their play and to encourage them.

Communication books were used in the Baby room detailing the activities engaged in during the day, sleep times, nappy changes and mealtimes. Parents and staff could write in the books which travelled between the service and home each day.

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Physical and material environment

The rooms were furnished with tables and chairs suitable to the age and stage of development of the children. Adult seating was available in each room for use by the staff and each room had a cosy area where the children could rest and relax on floor mats, cushions or sofas.

There was a large ball pool with vinyl covered foam sides in the baby room.

Toys and resources were stored on child height storage units that were easy for the children to access.

Some resources such as sensory boxes and craft materials were stored away from the general play materials and brought out when needed.

The walls of the rooms were covered with the children's art work, family photos, birthday wall and special interest posters which the staff had made, such as the mood posters, solar system, manners and 'kind hands' posters. The children's art was also displayed in the windows at the front of the premises where parents could see it.

Non-Compliance Information

Physical and material environment

Some of the interest areas, particularly the home corners, were lacking resources to support play and exploration and to extend the learning in these areas. For example, the washing up basin was missing from several of the kitchen units and kitchen accessories such as plates, pots, pans, cups, play food and food packages were not available in each room. It is acknowledged that the service had a supply of new toys in the office to replace broken or missing toys from the rooms however, staff also discussed the problem they had with toys being frequently broken.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

New kitchen accessories and kitchens have been purchased for each room and play resources have been increased by introducing more real and recycled materials such as empty containers from food and household products. Staff will report to the manager when toys are broken and they will be replaced.

Supporting documentation submitted

Proof of purchase for new play kitchens and kitchen accessories was received via email on 9 July 2026.

Summary Comment

All evidence submitted meets the requirements of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

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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

The service had a healthy eating policy. Most of the foods eaten by the children during the day were provided by the service apart from packed lunches for children who wanted to bring them. Perishable foods were stored in a fridge. There was a four-week rotating menu. Breakfast, snacks and dinner were provided. Breakfast consisted of cereal, toast and milk. Snacks included a selection of fruits, raisins and crackers. The displayed menu showed a selection of different dinners which were provided to the children such as shepherd's pie, chicken curry and rice, roast chicken served with mashed potato and vegetables, homemade beef burgers served with gravy, mash and vegetables. Drinking water was available to the children throughout the day.

Children's allergies, food intolerances or special dietary requirements were taken into consideration when planning the menus.

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 door to the premises was locked and needed to be opened from the inside. Staff were required to answer a call bell system to grant access, therefore children could not exit the service unsupervised and unsupervised visitors could not enter. The outdoor play areas were secured to prevent children leaving. There was soft fall matting present in the outdoor area. Cleaning agents and hazardous materials were stored inaccessible to children. Radiator covers were present to prevent injury to children.

The staff maintained a list of children with known food allergies or intolerances. The service was a nut-free zone to help reduce the risk of any child with a nut allergy becoming exposed to nuts while attending the service. Staff stated that in warm, sunny weather the children engaged in outdoor play in the morning when the outdoor play area was naturally shaded, to avoid children becoming overheated or sunburnt.

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Electric fans were used in the activity rooms during warm weather to help maintain the temperatures within the recommended range of 18-22°C.

Highchairs used in the baby room were fitted with five-point harnesses to ensure the safety of the children while using the highchairs.

Staff stood beside the slide when it was in use to supervise the children and provide assistance if required.

Infection control:

The service had an infection prevention and control policy which included hand washing. The sinks in each room and in the sanitary accommodation areas were supplied with liquid soap, paper towels and running water. Staff and children were observed washing their hands at appropriate times during the day such as after using the toilet or nappy changing and before eating.

The town was on a 'boil water notice' at the time of the inspection. The service bought in bottled water to give to the children to drink.

Administration of medication:

The service had a policy regarding the administration of medication to children while attending the service. Signed parental consent was sought prior to medication being given to a child attending the service. Care plans were available for children with special medical needs to support staff to meet each child's needs and to guide them through any emergency procedures.

Safe sleep:

The service had a safe sleep policy. Children were monitored while they slept. Children under 2 years old slept in a cot in the sleep room off the Baby room. Physical checks were carried out in sleeping babies every 10 minutes and a record was maintained of these checks.

Fire safety:

Fire exits were found to be unobstructed on the day of inspection.

There were fire evacuation procedures displayed in a prominent area within the service.

Firefighting equipment was present in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General safety:

1. Garda vetting disclosures for two staff members were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

Infection control:

2. Waterproof mattress covers were not available on two of the seven cot mattresses in the sleep room.

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3. A bottle maker was being used in the Baby room to heat and measure water to make up infant formula for two of the babies attending the service. The use of these machines is not permitted in childcare services as there is not enough research to show these machines are safe and effective for preparing babies bottles. It is recommended that infant formula be reconstituted at home and brought into the service in cooler bags then stored in the fridge until required, in line with best practice guidelines.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General safety:

1. Garda vetting renewals were received and sent on to inspector following the inspection. The service will apply for re-vetting three months in advance of it being due to ensure it is returned within the three-year timeframe.

Infection control:

2. New waterproof mattress covers have been ordered for the cot mattresses.
3. The bottle maker was removed from use on the day of the inspection.

Supporting documentation submitted

General safety:

1. Evidence that updated garda vetting was applied for in respect of both members of staff was received.

Infection control:

2. Proof of purchase of the waterproof mattress covers for cots was received by email on 9 July 2026.

Summary Comment

All evidence submitted meets the requirements of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

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*

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*(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.*

Compliance Information

(1) Paper records were being completed for children's attendance in the service. Staff were responsible for maintaining the children's attendance records.

(3)(a) Unauthorised persons were not allowed in the service without the permission of the person in charge.

(b) A visitor book was maintained at the reception desk for visitors, such as the early years inspector, to sign in.