

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2020LH002
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Name of Service:	Miniminds Preschool
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Address of Service:	Park Hall, Coulter Place, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 WP78
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Name of Registered Provider:	Niamh Hoey
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	22/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	52	PM	42
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna & A M Cunningham
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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

Miniminds Preschool has been registered as an Early Years' service since September 2020. The service provides sessional, part-time, and full day care to pre-school children and operates from 8am to 6pm each weekday. The service currently caters for the care needs of a maximum of 68 pre-school children aged 2 to 6 years. The service is located in a residential area of Dundalk, Co. Louth. It is a purpose-built premises which consists of 5 playrooms: The Red Room and Green Room, which are located on the ground floor and The Orange, Yellow and Blue Rooms that are located on the first floor. Ancillary accommodation consists of sanitary facilities, a kitchen area, storage areas and a staff and office area, all located on the ground floor. Additional office and storage areas, plus a second sanitary area, are also located on the first floor. The children have access to four developed outdoor play areas on the premises.

Staffing

A total of 22 staff is employed to work in the service. This includes the registered provider, two maintenance persons, one admin person, a cook, a school-aged staff member and 16 staff who work directly with the preschool children. One student was present in the Red room on the day of inspection.

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and*
- (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) The service had a designated person in charge, who is the registered provider and two named persons to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider and review of the staff roster, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation, the designated person in charge or the named person in charge was on the premises.

(c) A management structure was in place, which was clearly identifiable through review of the staff roster, a staff display board and in discussion with the staff team.

(2) Following a review of previous inspection data, information available on the inspection

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and through discussion with the registered provider onsite, it was determined that 5 new staff members and 1 student had been employed since the last inspection. The references on file for 17 staff were compliant upon the service's last inspection; therefore, they were not reviewed upon this inspection.

(a) (b) Of the 5 new staff files and 1 student file reviewed, the following were available;

A total of 9 written and validated references from a previous employer were on file.

A total of 3 written and validated references from a reputable source were on file.

(c) Garda vetting for 13 staff reviewed upon the last inspection met regulatory compliance; therefore, they were not reviewed upon this inspection. Four staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal, and the 5 new staff and 1 student vetting records were reviewed as follows;

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the 5 new staff, and 1 student, and vetting renewals had been obtained for the four staff members whose vetting was due for renewal.

The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all employed staff and 1 student.

(d) Employment records of 17 staff employed were reviewed at the services' last inspection, and regulatory compliance was achieved; therefore, they were not reviewed upon this inspection.

A review of the employment history for the 5 newly employed staff and 1 student demonstrated that no adult had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. Therefore, police vetting was not required.

(4) Documentary evidence reviewed at the last inspection for the 13 staff employed to work directly with children, and upon this inspection for 4 new childcare staff, confirmed that the 17 staff employed to work directly with children held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications. A qualification for one school-aged staff member, the cook, two maintenance persons, an admin person and the student is not required as they are not employed to work directly with the preschool children.

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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.

(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) On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

Morning Time:

Four adults cared for 12 children aged 3 years 6 months to 4 years 3 months in the Green Room, of whom 3 attended on a sessional basis and 9 attended on a part-time or full-day care basis.

Two adults cared for 10 children aged 2 years 5 months to 3 years 3 months in the Red Room, all of whom attended on a part-time or full-day care basis.

Two adults cared for 4 children aged 4 years 2 months to 4 years 7 months in the Yellow Room, of whom 1 attended on a sessional basis, and 3 attended on a part-time or full day care basis.

Three adults cared for 17 children aged 4 years 4 months to 5 years in the Blue Room, of whom 3 attended on a sessional basis, and 14 attended on a part-time or full-day care basis.

Two adults cared for 9 children aged 4 years 3 months to 3 years 3 months in the Orange Room, of whom 1 attended on a sessional basis, and 8 attended on part-time or full-day care basis.

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Afternoon:

Three adults cared for 9 children aged 3 years 6 months to 4 years 3 months in the Green Room, of whom 3 attended on a sessional basis, and 9 attended on a full-day care basis.

Two adults cared for 8 children aged 2 years 5 months to 3 years 3 months in the Red Room, of whom 5 attended on a sessional basis, and 3 attended on a full-day care basis.

The Yellow Room was used by school-aged children in the afternoon.

Three adults cared for 17 children aged 3 years to 5 years in the Blue Room, of whom 5 attended on a sessional basis, and 12 attended on a part-time or full-day care basis.

Two adults cared for 8 children aged 3 years 2 months to 5 years in the Orange Room, of whom 2 attended on a sessional basis, and 6 attended on a part-time or full day care basis.

In addition to the above, the registered provider worked in the office and was available to cover in the care rooms where required, along with two staff rostered to provide relief in care rooms and to cover lunches.

(8) A review of the staff roster demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times while the service was in operation.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

- (a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and*
- (b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.*

Compliance Information

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

Healthy eating was promoted within the service; all snacks and meals were prepared daily on site. The snack and meal times were observed to be relaxed and used as opportunities for children, student and staff to engage in conversations. Children who used the toilet were encouraged to do so independently. The toilets are located off the hallway across from the care rooms, and when children needed to use these areas, the staff went with the children to supervise and provide support where needed. Children's self-care was promoted through

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encouragement of older children to clean their own noses, with staff helping younger children when required. Aprons were provided for messy play activities, and children had spare clothing within the service. Children who required sleep, slept after dinner time. Rest areas, which included a variety of soft mats, child-sized sofas, and cushions, were available in the care rooms, providing areas for children to take some time out to rest during their day. The children from each of the care rooms experienced a change of environment to the outdoors during the inspection and were observed to be dressed appropriately for the weather on the day. Individual care plans, where required, were in place, and the staff in the relevant care rooms were familiar with them.

Supporting Relationships

The atmosphere upon the inspector's arrival was warm and welcoming. The children were observed to be engaged in play and activities, and preparing for snack time, closely supported by staff. The children appeared familiar with those who cared for them and were observed on occasions to call out for the staff or student to support them in their play. The staff members and student were observed using gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of their friends' feelings, and turn-taking with toys was encouraged, with praise given for positive behaviour interactions. The staff and student were observed to treat each child with respect, addressing each child by name and were observed to have a strong awareness of the child's home life, with discussions occurring that demonstrated familiarity with the child's family circle. The student and staff members and in all care rooms were observed to communicate using soft, gentle and positive tones while interacting with the children. Communication with parents is in person upon arrival and collection, and parents/carers bring children directly into the care rooms. A digital application to record children's sleep, toilet/nappy changes, sleep records and observations is also used.

Staff communicated frequently with one another, and transitions were observed to be smooth throughout the inspection. Strong teamwork is evident throughout the service; management, the staff members and the student were observed to work well together. Regular staff support and staff meetings are carried out.

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.

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Compliance Information

The service provides all snacks and meals to the children in attendance, unless otherwise agreed with the child's parents. A copy of a 3-week rolling menu was available, which detailed all meals served to the children, which were prepared and cooked on site by the cook. Breakfast cereal is served to children who require breakfast. At morning snack time staff encouraged children's independence, where children were observed to make up their own ham and cheese wraps, with the staff providing support where needed. The staff and student were observed to sit with the children at snack and dinner time, using these opportunities to engage in child-led conversations. The hot meals listed on the menu, while taking into consideration the age of children, provide a suitable, nutritious and varied choice for children. Meals were adjusted to suit younger children where required. Potatoes and meatballs were on the menu for the day of the inspection, which all children were observed to enjoy. The afternoon snack scheduled for 3.30 pm consisted of crackers, ham, cheese, a yoghurt and fruit. The person in charge, the cook, and the staff advised that if children requested more food, this was provided for, which was observed in practice on the day of inspection. The children's drink bottles were available and accessible in the care rooms throughout the day. Where children have specific dietary requirements and or allergies, the cook explained how they cater for and provide for any request from parents regarding allergies or dietary requirements.

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 and gates were secured upon the inspector's arrival. The entrance doors remained locked while not in use, ensuring no unauthorised person could enter the building or no child could leave the building unsupervised. A visitor's log was maintained, and the inspectors were requested to sign in and out. Ground surfacing, both indoors and outdoors, was maintained in a good state of repair with no trip hazards observed. Stairways were maintained in good condition and adequately lit. Storage areas were inaccessible to the children. Cleaning products were stored safely out of the reach of children. Play equipment and resources were observed to be maintained in good condition. The children were adequately supervised throughout the inspection process, with staff observed to carry out head counts before and after transitions to different areas. The outdoor areas are

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surrounded by secure walls, fencing and gates to prevent a pre-school child from gaining unsupervised access to a roadway or other source of danger. Risk assessments were completed up to date, and no risks were identified. Blind cords where they were fitted were adequately secured out of children's reach. Fire exits remained free from obstruction during the inspection.

Infection Control:

Handwashing was observed to take place after the children used the toilet and before snack and meal times. Tables were cleaned before and after meals. Any food items taken in from home are stored in the service's fridge. Thermostatically controlled warm water, hand soap, bins, and paper towels were available at each wash hand basin. Care rooms and sanitary areas were ventilated through means of openable windows, and were maintained between the required temperatures of 18°C - 22°C. The service was notably well kept, with all care rooms and sanitary areas observed to be maintained in a clean and hygienic manner. Cleaning schedules were in place, up to date and completed by the relevant staff. External waste bins were stored behind secure gates and were inaccessible to the children.

Safe Sleep:

Sleep facilities were provided for children aged 2 years and over. An area within the Green room was set up for sleep time after dinner, with suitable stackable beds and blankets for the children aged over 2 years of age. A sleep record was maintained for the sleeping children, which was completed by the adults at each ten-minute interval. The records detailed the child's name, position, breathing pattern and skin colour as well as the room temperature. Whilst children slept on stackable beds, a staff member was observed to remain with the sleeping children at all times.

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.

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Compliance Information

- (1) The registered provider ensured that a person who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. Nineteen staff members held in-date FAR training certificates.
- (2) (a) & (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available on the premises in each acre room and were stored in accessible and conspicuous locations out of the reach of children.

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.
- (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) A record of the monthly fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded on 14 April 2026.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated 13 August 2025, and the smoke alarms were dated 18 February 2026.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls throughout the service, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.