

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2020WH002
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Name of Service:	Little Friends Preschool
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Address of Service:	Townspark, Castlepollard, Mullingar, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	N91 RW29
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Name of Registered Provider:	Caroline Finegan , Anthony Finegan
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Service type:	Part Time
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Date of Inspection:	13/03/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	38	PM	12
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Mullingar, Co Westmeath
Inspection undertaken by:	C. O' Connor Hughes
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).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable
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Description of service

This independently operated service is registered for part time provision to accommodate children from two to six years of age. The service operates between the hours of 09:00 and 14:00 on a Monday to Friday basis.

An Early Childhood Care and Education programme operates from 09:00 to 12:00.

The Early Years' Service is in an adapted single storey building consisting of four pre-school rooms, a kitchen and an office. Three pre-school rooms are currently in use, namely Room 1, 2 and 3. A large outdoor play area is located at the back of the service. On-site parking and set down facilities are available.

Staffing

One of the registered providers was the designated person in charge and was in the service for the duration of the inspection. Seven adults were working directly with children on the 13 March 2024.

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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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 present, deputy 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.

(6) Paragraph (4) shall not apply before 1 September 2021 to a person who-

(a) has signed a declaration on or before 30 June 2016 to the effect that he or she intends to retire from employment in a pre-school service before 1 September 2021, and

(b) is in possession of a letter from the Minister confirming that paragraph (4) shall not apply to him or her before that date.

(6A) is inserted by S.I. No.632 of 2016 CHILD CARE ACT 1991 (EARLY YEARS SERVICES) (AMENDMENT)

REGULATIONS 2016 which states; Regulation 9 of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early

Years Services) Regulations (S.I. No. 221 of 2016) is amended - in paragraph (4), by the substitution of "paragraphs (5), (6) and (6A)" for "paragraphs (5) and (6)", and (b) by the insertion of the following paragraph after paragraph (6): "

(6A) Paragraph (4) shall not apply to an employee of a registered provider where - (a) the registered provider receives funding for the employment of the employee pursuant to a scheme funded by the Minister and known as the Access and Inclusion Model, and (b) the employment of the employee is for the purpose of providing support, pursuant to the scheme referred to in subparagraph (a), for a child attending the service to enable the child to participate in the programme known as the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) funding Programme."

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The designated person in charge and a named person to deputise were available as required.

(b)

One of the registered providers was present for the duration of the inspection.

Eight staff files including the registered providers were reviewed and the following was noted:

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(2)(a)(b)

Two written validated references were available in respect of the five staff members.

Two written references were available in respect of one staff member.

Two written references were available in respect of the registered providers.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the staff members and the registered providers.

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

(d)

Police vetting was available for one staff member who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)

The staff members working directly with children attending the service and held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Levels 5 to 7 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

(6) (a)

No employee had signed a declaration on or before the 30th of June 2016 to the effect that they intended to retire from employment in a pre-school service.

(6A)

An employee present was working directly with children under the Access and Inclusion Model.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

The written references were not validated in respect of one staff member prior to commencing employment in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Written References have now been validated in respect of one staff member.

All references will be validated in future. A checklist for each staff file has now been put in place.

Supporting documentation submitted

References and checklist submitted.

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Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector met the Regulatory requirement.

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.

(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-

(a) a sessional pre-school service, and

(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

(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 minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.
- (4)
There were thirty-eight children attending the service supervised directly by seven adults including the registered provider.
- (8)(a)
Documentation indicated that two adults are on the premises at all times.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

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(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)

In a sample review of fifteen child enrolment records information relating to (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h) and (i) was available in respect of the children attending the service.

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;*

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- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (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)

The service kept and maintained written records of information in relation to the service in accordance with Regulation 16 (1) (a)(b) (c) (d) (e) (f) (h) (i) and (j).

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(k)

In a review of the accident and incidents book parental signatures were not recorded on four accident forms to indicate that the parents had been informed on the day that the accident or incident occurred in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

All staff have been briefed on the importance of parental signatures in the incident / accident book.

One staff member has taken responsibility to check the book daily.

Supporting documentation submitted

Forms submitted with parental signatures.

Summary Comment

Evidence submitted and reviewed by the Early Years Inspector met the Regulatory requirement.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

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A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Compliance Information

A parent handbook for parents was available for review and detailed the information for parents for Regulation 16(1)(a) to (g).

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 18 – Copy of Act etc.

A registered provider shall ensure that a copy of Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act and of these Regulations is kept on the premises and the said copies shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (a) a parent or guardian of a child attending or proposing to attend the service,*
- (b) an employee, unpaid worker or contractor, and*
- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

A copy of the of Part V11A (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No.40 of 2013) of the Act and Regulations was available for inspection by (a)(b)(c).

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

Children were observed to enjoy the morning play routine that included physical games, singing songs and rhymes, tabletop activities and birthday celebrations supervised by staff.

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Children washed their hands independently prior to snack time. Healthy lunches were provided by parents that included sandwiches, fruit, yoghurt and crackers with water to drink. Children took their time eating and conversing with their friends. Staff sat with the children and assisted them as required.

The care practices and routines were child led with the staff following the individual verbal and non-verbal cues of the child. Individual care plans are in place for children additional support and supervision.

A key person system is in place in the service to help promote the emotional security for children. The staff were positive towards children and were familiar with each child, their personalities and their daily routines. Staff were observed to give comfort and reassurance to the children. Staff used individual names, maintained eye contact and conversed with the children during play activities, nappy changing, toileting and mealtimes. Good teamwork was observed amongst staff.

A range of developmentally appropriate experiences to meet children's learning needs was available in Room 1,2 and 3. Age and stage appropriate toys and materials were accessible to children on low level shelving. Children's artwork was displayed in each room depicting the "St Patricks Day" theme.

The service works in partnership with parents and guardians. Parents were observed to collect their children from the pre-school room after the ECCE session. A verbal handover was provided to parents at this time.

Staff stated parents and new children to commence the pre-school term are invited to the service for an open day on an annual basis to familiarise the children with their environment and to meet staff members.

Each child has their own learning journal depicting their play and work activities. This journal is shared with parents during the pre-school term. Parents have the opportunity to comment on their child's activities. Staff stated the children's artwork is sent home to parents on a regular basis.

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 19 to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

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(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.

(3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-

(a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises,

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Suitable and adequate play and work equipment were provided indoors and outdoors which included toys and equipment for construction, tabletop activities, arts and crafts and home corners.

(b)

Low level beds were available in the service for any child over the age of two years who required rest or sleep. Children were observed to rest and relax in cosy rest areas in the pre-school rooms.

(3) (a)

An outdoor play area was available to the rear of the service. The surface area consisted of grass and tarmac. The area was equipped with various play experiences that included water play, muddy play, climbing, imaginative play and physical play. Children from Room 3 were observed to play in the sheltered outdoor play area off Room 1. A shed was available for the storage of toys and equipment.

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:

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The main entrance door to the service was secure to ensure the safety of the children within. The inspector signed the visitors book on arrival. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents.

Infection Control:

Warm running water was available at wash hand basins. The water temperature recorded at the wash hand basin was 35 to 40 degrees Celsius. Hand paper towels and liquid soap was available in the sanitary accommodation.

The premises were visually clean. All toys and materials were easily cleanable. Cleaning schedules were available and reviewed.

Foot operated pedal bins were available in the pre-school room and in the sanitary accommodation for the hygienic disposal of waste.

The sanitary accommodation and pre-school rooms were ventilated by openable windows.

Refrigerators were available in each pre-school room for the storage of perishable goods.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was stored safely in the service if a child presented with a high temperature. Upon discussion with staff and a review of the documentation correct procedures were in place for the administration of prescribed medication for a child attending the service. A health care plan was in place for a child requiring daily medication.

Safe Sleep:

The registered provider stated children attending on a part time basis do not sleep in the service. Low level beds were available for children to rest if required.

Fire Safety:

Emergency exits were unobstructed in the service. The fire assembly point was noted in the outdoor play area to the front of the service.

Outing:

The registered provider stated the service has not undertaken outings since the pandemic.

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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)

An adult was qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation.

(2)(a)

A first aid box was located in the reception area in the service.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to children in the pre-school service.

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 written record for the completed monthly fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was

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recorded as taking place on the 1 March 2024.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms in the premises were serviced on the 14 August 2023 and 18 December 2023.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for the number of children attending the service. The expiry date noted was 27 March 2024.