

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2022FL009
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Name of Service:	Balcunnin Learn'Play Preschool
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Address of Service:	Balcunnin, Skerries, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	K34 ND35
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Name of Registered Provider:	Barbara Thornton
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	12/02/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	12	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle
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

Balcunnin Learn'Play Preschool is a sessional early years service which was established in 2023. The service provides sessional preschool care and education to children aged 2 to 6 years and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9am to 12 midday Monday to Friday. An enclosed outdoor area is located to the side of the service.

Staffing

The registered provider and one staff member work directly with the children on a daily basis. Two relief staff members are available 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:

- 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 9,11, 19, 23, 25 and 26; however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 15 and 24. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

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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, 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.*

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(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 and a named person to deputise as required.
- (b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced on the morning of the inspection.

The files for 4 staff members including the registered provider and 3 staff members which included 2 relief staff members were reviewed.

- (2)(a) The following references were available from a past employer:

Two written references were available for the registered provider

Two validated written references were available for 2 staff members employed in the service.

- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider and 3 staff members. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

- (4) Four staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service, and each held appropriate childcare qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

- (2)(a)(b) Two validated written references were not available for one member of staff.
- (d) International police vetting was not available for 1 adult who had lived outside the State as an adult for more than 6 consecutive months.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

- (2) (a)(b) Two references for one member of staff were all sent to inspectorate and accepted.
- (d) Police vetting was submitted to inspectorate and accepted.

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Preventive Action

(2) (a) As per our policies and procedures they will ensure that all required documents will be available for inspection, and all submitted prior to starting employment.

(d) They now know to make sure that if anyone has been away for six months or more that we need international vetting for that person.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documented evidence was provided.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under regulation 9 – Management and recruitment has been adequately addressed.

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 staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

There were 2 adults working directly with 12 children aged 3 years to 4 years 10 months.

(8)(a) Not applicable as the service does not operate single handedly.

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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) Eleven children's records were reviewed. The registration forms were completed with the required information as specified in subsections (a) to (i) of this regulation.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) Three children who were in attendance in the service did not have a child record form completed.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) Record forms are filled out for those children and on file and have been emailed to inspectorate.

Preventive Action

(1) They will ensure that all children have record forms on file and this will be checked by the owner/manager.

Supporting documentation submitted

Child record forms for 3 children.

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Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child has been adequately addressed.

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 observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

Basic needs:

- There was a welcoming atmosphere in the service with children observed to be engaged in activity and conversation when the inspector arrived at the service. The registered provider and staff member were observed to be attentive and caring in their interactions with the children, demonstrating their familiarity and understanding of the children when they spoke about them.
- The personal care needs of the children were attended to promptly with the children using the bathroom independently with discreet supervision provided when needed. The children who needed additional support with toileting were provided with assistance. The children were supported in putting their coats on independently before they went home.
- Transitions were observed to be well supported in the service. The children were provided with regular updates and reminders as to when an activity was coming to an end and what was happening next.
- A comfortable rest area comprising of a low sized couch was available for the children to take a break from activities.
- The staff members were observed supporting the children's choice when they chose to change or opt out of activities. For example, whilst a group of children engaged in sensory play, 3 children who chose not to engage in the activity were facilitated and supported to play in the home area.

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- The staff members were observed to approach children's behaviour in a positive and calm way. There was an emphasis on praise and encouragement to promote positive behaviour.

Supporting relationships:

- The 2 staff members were consistent in their interactions with the children, providing regular praise and encouragement, asking open ended questions to give the children opportunity to express themselves and their feelings and ensuring that each child in the session was happy and engaged in activity. Children were also spoken about with positivity, and the staff members expressed awareness and understanding about children who needed additional help and support to participate in their preschool experience in a meaningful way.
- The children appeared confident and relaxed in their environment and were observed naturally forming small groups while engaging in a range of activities during the inspection.
- Parents and guardians were observed being welcomed by the staff members when the children were going home from the service with the opportunity taken for updating the parents and guardians regarding their child's day in the service taken at this time.

Physical and material environment:

- In the care room resources were easily available and accessible on low level shelving. The children demonstrated familiarity with navigating their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- The service is conducted over 2 interconnecting rooms which were bright and visually appealing with play materials and equipment which were well organised within the various areas of interest in the room. Areas of interest within the room included a home area with a well-resourced kitchen, a dolls house with a range of play materials. Transportation toys including cars and a wide variety of tabletop materials including jigsaws, construction materials and a broad selection of Montessori materials. A sensory table containing dried lentils provided the children with the opportunity for sensory play and a wide selection of books supported the children's language development which was further enhanced by storytelling and singing.
- A fully enclosed outdoor area is located to the side of the service. The area is covered with grass and an area which is covered with a safety surface. A climbing frame with a slide and swings was available which had a sand tray beneath it along with a see saw, a basketball hoop and a playhouse.

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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 entrance doors leading into the premises were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The service's designated emergency exits were unobstructed.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- The premises, play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition.
- The children's tables were observed to be appropriately cleaned prior to and following the morning snack.

Administration of Medication:

- No child was observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- The fire exits were clearly signposted and were unobstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Children's snack food, some of which contained meat and dairy produce, were not stored under refrigerated conditions and were kept in the children's bags at room temperature on the day of inspection. This increased the risk of bacteria multiplying to levels which could result in food poisoning.
2. The water at both sinks in the sanitary area was cold. Cold water does not support effective hand hygiene.
3. The children did not wash their hands before they ate their morning snack, increasing the risk of cross contamination.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

Infection Control:

1. A fridge has been put into the classroom and the children's lunch is stored in it.
2. A plumber has been employed to connect the hot tap to the sinks in order to achieve infection control.
3. They have now written it into their daily routine that handwashing is essential prior to eating lunch.

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Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. Every morning now once all the children are in staff put their lunches in the fridge in the kitchen until lunch time and this will be done every morning as part of our routine by a member of staff and the children themselves.
2. Now that the taps have been connected to the hot taps it will no longer happen again.
3. It is now written into their daily routine, and we will stop activities ten minutes earlier in order to facilitate this.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photograph of fridge.

Invoice from plumber.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child has been adequately addressed.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) Records demonstrated that the date and time of attendance and departure in respect of 9 of the 12 pre-school children in attendance.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection 3 children who were present in the service were not signed into the attendance register. This is a safety risk in the event of the service requiring an emergency evacuation.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(1) All staff have been advised that even children who are family and only with us for the day must be acknowledged on the attendance sheets for dropping off and collecting and roll sheet.

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Preventive Action

(1) All staff now are aware that every child even if they are only with us for a day must be on the register whether they are family or not.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of sign in records.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance has been adequately addressed.

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) A person trained in first aid including first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service as evidenced in the staff roster and the in-date FAR certifications provided for inspection in respect of the registered provider, who works in the service on a daily basis.

(2)(a) and (b) The first aid box was suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions on the premises, out of the reach of children.

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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.
- (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 was maintained of fire drills which had been completed in the service. Based on the records maintained and as reported by staff members, fire drills were carried out monthly. The last recorded fire drill for the whole service took place on 04/02/2026.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises

Non-Compliance Information

- (b) A record was not available of either the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment or smoke alarms in the premises.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

- (b) The smoke alarms were tested and checked and all working satisfactorily, and this was carried out on 11th March 2026 and a copy of invoice sent to inspectorate by email. A new fire extinguisher has been bought, and the invoice has been forwarded to inspectorate.

Preventive Action

- (b) It has been arranged for the service to be done yearly.

Supporting documentation submitted

Maintenance records for the smoke alarms and fire extinguishers

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified under regulation 26 - Fire safety measures has been adequately addressed.