

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2023LH002
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Name of Service:	Smart Start Playschool
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Address of Service:	Ballymakenny Business Park, Ballymakenny Road, Drogheda, Co. Louth
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Name of Registered Provider:	Denise Lynch
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	27/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	67	PM	46
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
Inspection undertaken by:	D.Murray & AM. Cunningham
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

Smart Start Playschool is a privately owned childcare facility in operation since January 2024. The service provides full day, part-time and sessional care to preschool children between the ages of 1 to 6 years. A school aged service is also provided. The service operates from 7:30 am to 6:00 pm and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The converted two-storey building consisting of 4 care rooms.

Downstairs:

Bumble Bee room facilitated the care of children from 16 months to 2 years.

Busy Beavers room provided care and education to children from 2 years 8 months to 5 years.

Butterfly room caters for children from 2 to 3 years.

Upstairs:

Badgers room and the **Bears room** provided care and education to children from 2 years 8 months to 5 years.

The Busy Beavers room accommodates school aged children in the afternoons.

Other facilities in the service were sanitary facilities, kitchen and 2 offices. A large enclosed outdoor space is available to the side of the building.

Staffing

The registered provider employs a manager, deputy manager, 14 childcare staff, 2 school aged staff members, 1 administration staff, cook and cleaner. Three students were also on placement 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

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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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 19,20,21,22&23. As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Bumblebee, Butterfly, Badgers and the Bears rooms and did not include the Busy Beavers room.

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, manager and deputy manager, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

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

(b) A designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to carry out the inspection.

(2) (a)&(b) There was 1 new childcare staff and 3 students new to the service since the last inspection. All remaining files were reviewed on the last inspection and met compliance following the Corrective and Preventive Action (CAPA) process.

Eight validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.

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(c) Garda vetting disclosure was available for the 4 staff members. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Police vetting was available for 1 student who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) The 1 new childcare staff who worked directly with the pre-school children held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

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) Present on the morning of the inspection were the registered provider, manager, deputy manager and 13 childcare staff providing direct care to the 67 pre-school children.

(2) On the morning of the inspection the following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at capacity:

Bumble Bee room had 3 staff members providing care to 10 children ranging in age from 16 months to 2 years all attending on a full day care basis.

Busy Beavers room had 3 staff members provided care to 20 children ranging in age from 2 years 8 months to 5 years all attending on a sessional basis.

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Butterfly room had 2 staff members providing care to 11 children ranging in age from 2 to 3 years attending on a full day care basis.

Badgers room had 3 staff members provided care to 16 children ranging in age from 2 years 8 months to 5 years, 15 children were attending on a full day care basis with 1 child attending on a sessional basis.

Bears room had 2 staff members providing care to 10 children ranging in age from 2 years 8 months to 5 years attending on a full day.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that there were always two adults on the premises when the service was in operation as documented on the staff roster.

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 of the Infants and Children:

- Staff members were observed changing children's nappies regularly and in a timely manner with warm one-to-one interactions observed. The older children were encouraged to become independent and self-caring, suitable to their age and stage of development which included using the toilet, hand washing, caring for their belongings and tidying away after activities and play.
- The service embraces outdoor play and learning with all children observed enjoying meaningful, sustained play with their peers.
- The staff members sat and chatted with the children at mealtimes, helping the children when required whilst encouraging and supporting language development. Children had easy access to their drinking containers which were accessible in their care rooms.
- All children were placed to sleep for a scheduled period of rest at the service's designated sleep time after dinner.

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- The themes of the month were “The Earth”, “Planting” and “The Planets”. Children had herbs growing in pots along with artwork displayed to reflect these themes. Each child had a scrap book/Learning Journal which was sent home once completed.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The staff members were observed to be very caring, kind and attentive in their interactions with the children and demonstrated sensitivity and responsiveness to each child’s individual needs, likes and preferences. Any child who became upset or who had difficulty sleeping were nurtured and cuddled until they settled.
- The service showed a positive regard towards the families of the children and family links were nurtured in the service with family photographs displayed in the care rooms which gave a sense of identity and belonging. Engagement with families and parents was facilitated by the daily sharing of information at drop off and collection which was supported by electronic means.

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-
- (b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day.
- (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)(b) Cosy areas consisting of mats, cushions and soft furnishings were available in all care rooms should a child needed to take a break from activities and rest. The Busy Beavers room was used for children who availed of an afternoon nap.
- (3)(a) The outdoor space was enclosed by fencing with secure gates. The surface area consisted of soft tiles and a cemented area. The partially sheltered area permitted children to play outside sheltered from the weather.

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Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

- The care rooms were laid out in clearly defined areas of interest to support children to engage in self-directed and creative play. Areas of interest included well developed home and kitchen corners with a range of 'real world' equipment to promote and extend role play. Construction areas, transport toys, arts and crafts materials, musical instruments were available along with a variety of tabletop resources. The environments also contained a range of natural materials and open-ended materials to encourage curiosity and exploration.
- The outdoor area provided ample opportunity for movement, sensory play and outdoor learning. Equipment included ride on toys, slide, rockers, plastic kitchen, tyres, mud kitchen with play equipment, wooden playhouses, climbing wall, climbing frame and seating available for children.

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 1-week menu plan with a variety of snacks and main meals ranging from meat and poultry. Breakfast was served from 7:30am to 8am consisting of a variety of cereals, toast and yogurts. Morning snack was served at 09:30am which consisted of fruit, cream crackers, cream cheese and yogurt. Dinner was served at 11am which consisted of pasta and tomato sauce. Afternoon tea was served at 13:30pm which consisted of ham and cheese wraps. Fresh fruit consisting of pineapple and watermelon were served at 16:00pm before leaving for home. Water was the drink of choice.

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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 following safety measures were in place on the day of inspection as demonstrated by the following examples:

- The main door to the service was secured by a locking system which had to be operated by a staff member. These security measures ensured that a child did not exit unsupervised and restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- All cleaning agents were stored out of reach of the children.
- All furniture and display units had a stable base with no risk of toppling identified. All play equipment seen on the day of inspection was suitable for the age, stage and development of the children in each care room.
- Indoor and outdoor risk assessments were carried out on a daily basis and documented on a daily risk assessment sheet.
- All blind cords were secure.

Infection Control:

The following infection control measures were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- The service was clean with cleaning schedules maintained on a daily basis.
- All bins for disposal of nappies were foot pedal operated.
- Warm water, hand paper towel and liquid soap was available in the children's sanitary facilities.
- All creams were labelled with the children's name.

The following Safe sleep practices were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- Children who were sleeping on stackable beds in the Busy Beavers room were supervised by an adequate number of adults at all times.
- A sleep log was maintained on all sleeping children at 10 minutes interval recording their colour, breathing pattern and position.
- A thermometer was available in the Busy Beavers room to measure the air temperature which was maintained between 18°C to 22°C while children were sleeping.

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Fire Safety:

The following Fire Safety practices were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- All emergency exit doors were accessible in the event of an evacuation.
- Fire drills were recorded on a monthly basis.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Nappy changing practices were not being carried out in a manner that would prevent the spread of infection and were not in accordance with the services nappy changing policy.

- In the Badgers room a staff member was observed changing three children's nappies in concession without changing gloves or apron. The staff member brought the children back to the care room each time wearing the aprons and gloves used for nappy change.
- The changing mat was not cleaned after each nappy change.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Nappy changing practices was discussed at the recent staff meeting and the nappy changing policy has been reviewed. Manager will complete regular audits to ensure that the nappy changing policy is implemented in practice.

Supporting documentation submitted

Audit Check List.

Minutes of staff meeting.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliances. The response received has been reviewed and accepted.

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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) The service provided evidence that a person had up to date First Aid Responders course and was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service.
- (2)(a) and (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and safely stored in the premises.

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 was available of the fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill took place on the morning of the 07/04/2026.
- (b) A record was maintained of the mains powered smoke alarms and fire fighting equipment. The mains powered smoke alarm was last serviced on 3/07/2025. The fire fighting equipment was last serviced on 6 /08/2025.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed in the premises.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that the service was adequately insured for 66 children at any one time attending for full day care. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28th March 2026 to the 27th March 2027.