

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC137
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Name of Service:	Early Starters Limited
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Address of Service:	Main Street Community Hall, Castletownroche, Mallow, Co Cork
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Eircode:	P51 AC9H
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sara O'Callaghan
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	18/11/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	11	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	13 Market Square Mallow Co Cork P51DD5Y
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Inspection undertaken by:	B Fraher
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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	N/A
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Description of service

Early Starters Limited is a sessional community-based service which is registered to operate between the hours of 9:00 to 12:30 and the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE Scheme) is facilitated during this time. The service is registered to accommodate children from 2 to 6 years of age but the children who attend presently are aged from 2 years 6 months to 6 years. It operates 38 weeks of the year. The facility is situated in the community hall in the village of Castletownroche in north Cork, having one main care room, a kitchen, an outdoor play area and sanitary facilities for both staff and children. The service also has access to a hall and an outdoor astroturf.

Staffing

There were three staff attached to the service and a total of two staff working with the children on the day of inspection. The registered provider was not working 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/ safety/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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 children, person in charge and staff 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 on the day of inspection and a named deputy in the service that could deputise as required.
- (b) The deputy was on duty at the service when the inspector arrived. The staff roster indicated that either the person in charge or the deputy was on duty at all times during the hours of operation.
- (c) There was clear evidence on inspection of the management structure in place and the specific roles of each staff member.
- (2) The recruitment records in relation to three adults, two of whom were employed in the service and the registered provider were the subject of inspection.
- (a) Of the six required references, six were from previous employers with required records of validation on file.
- (b) Of the six required references, none were from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were obtained and were on file for the three staff. 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 not required for any of the three adults as they did not live outside of the state for longer than six consecutive months.
- (4) The three adults who worked directly with the children held a relevant qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education from level 5 to level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policies met the regulatory requirements:

- The infection control policy
- The healthy eating policy
- The authorisation to collect policy
- The fire safety policy

The above policies and procedures adequately guided the staff in their care practices.

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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1) At the time of inspection, there were the adequate number of adults required, responsible for the direct care and supervision of the children in attendance at all times.

(3) The service exceeded the minimum ratio required as per regulation in the care room. The 11 children attending the service were supervised directly by 2 adults.

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

On the day of inspection, the following information was obtained through direct observation and discussion with the staff and examination of the relevant documents.

Basic needs:

- Drinking water was accessible to the children throughout the day.
- Food was prepared by parents and guardians and consisted of cheese, crackers, strawberries, yogurts and rice cakes. The food was stored in the refrigerator and was observed to be healthy and nutritious.
- During snack time, children were assigned the role of helper and obtained the lunch boxes from the refrigerator and gave them out to the other children.
- Appropriate seating was available in the form of low-level tables and chairs.
- The children were observed to access the sanitary area independently with the staff available to assist if required.
- Children were observed washing their hands before snack time and after using the toilet.
- The layout of the care room supported the children to move freely within their environment and to engage in their chosen tasks.
- A quiet space was incorporated into the care room which allowed children to rest if needed. Children who wished to rest while they attended the service could avail of three low size children's couches.
- The children can avail of playtime in an enclosed outdoor area, astroturf or indoor hall. On the day of inspection, the children opted to play in the indoor hall. The person in charge informed the inspector that they access the outdoor area on a regular basis.

Supporting relationships:

- Throughout the morning, staff in the care room were heard engaging in social conversation with the children, which helped to promote a relaxed and happy atmosphere.

- The children were encouraged to tidy up the toys prior to snack time and given 10 minutes notice prior to clean up time, which promoted a sense of responsibility.
- During mealtimes, the staff sat with the children in a relaxed environment, affording sufficient time for children to enjoy their food. Staff discussed topics of interest with the children during mealtimes.
- Staff engaged with the children in both group and individual activities. Group activities consisted of singing, dancing and playing musical chairs. Staff were observed to sit at floor level with the children reading to them, building puzzles, playing games and promoting conversation. Examples of this were cooking food and discussing what they would like to eat which supported positive relationships with the children and language development.
- All children were observed to be actively encouraged by staff to participate in activities. Children received a lot of interaction from staff and appeared happy and content in their surroundings. This was observed through the staff playing dolls, going to a barbeque and doing puzzles with the children.
- Staff were observed to be warm and caring in their interactions with the children. For example, a staff member was observed comforting a child who was upset, by speaking to them in a gentle tone and sitting them on her lap while offering reassurance.
- Communication with parents/guardians was observed at collection. Staff stated they also use a group and individual messaging application, email and phone.
- Many children demonstrated a sense of pride in their success for example, making volcano's. Children were observed calling on the staff members to share their achievements. The staff members readily acknowledged and encouraged the children's efforts and accomplishments.
- Family photos were displayed on the walls indoors. This promoted a sense of belonging.

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:

- Entry to the service was via a fire door. This was controlled by an electromagnetic lock, which could be released by a switch which was located at adult height or an emergency release if needed. These safety mechanisms ensured that the risk of unauthorised access and the risk of a child exiting the premises unsupervised were minimalised.
- The toys were suitable and those assessed were in good condition.
- Cleaning products were inaccessible and out of reach to children.
- The windows in the care room were out of reach from the children.

Infection control:

- Handwashing facilities were accessible to the children with running water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Children were observed to wash their hands before meals and after using the sanitary facilities.
- Lidded pedal bins were in use for the disposal of waste in the sanitary area and the care rooms.
- Children's coats were stored off the ground on hooks.
- Two refrigerators were available in the care room for the storage of perishable foods.

Administration of medication:

- The person in charge informed the inspector that no regular medicine was being administered to a child currently in the service.
- Temperature reducing medicines were stored out of reach of the children and a medication administration record was available should this be required.

Fire safety:

- Fire exits were noted to be free from obstruction.
- Fire extinguishers were secured to the walls.

Outing:

- No outings were conducted on the day of inspection. The person in charge informed the inspector that they may take walks to areas of the village and a school tour. A risk assessment was reviewed for the last school

tour. On discussing the risk assessment with the person in charge, the risk assessment had a number of strategies in place to mitigate identified risks to the children.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

1) The attendance book was available and the inspector observed that all the children present on the day had their check in and out times completed.

(3)

(b) A daily record of visitors to the premises was maintained. The inspector was signed in and out on a visitors record book.

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) Written records of the fire drills that took place in the service were furnished to the inspector. The last date recorded was noted as 20 October 2025.

(b) Written records were available of the servicing of the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarms. The firefighting certificate was dated 2 April 2025, and the smoke alarm certificate was dated 18 August 2025.

(4) The services fire evacuation procedure was clearly displayed at the fire exit door.

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. The insurance policy commenced on 28 March 2025 and will expire on 27 March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*

Compliance Information

- (a) From a visual assessment, the building appeared to be of sound and stable structure.
- (b) The outdoor environment was enclosed securely by stone walls and a high metal gate.

Non-Compliance Information

(c) On the day of inspection both the child and adult sanitary facilities had no means of being heated. The temperature in the children's sanitary facilities was recorded at 11.6°C and the adult's sanitary facilities was 11.3°C. The sanitary area was not adequately heated for use by the children. The recommended air temperature is between 18°C and 22°C. This was also evident on the last inspection on 8 March 2023. On discussion with the person in charge the corrective and preventative action of installing wall heaters in both bathrooms had not been carried out.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The following response was received from the registered provider:

Corrective and Preventive Action

A wall mounted heater has been fitted in the bathroom out of reach of the children. Staff will ensure that the bathroom is maintained at a temperature between 18°C and 22°C. Funding is secured to build a new bathroom.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence was received of a new fitted heater. A letter was also submitted from the community hall committee stating work to build a new bathroom will commence in the springtime.

Summary Comment

The corrective action submitted by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 29 (c).