

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CC147
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Name of Service:	Emma's Playschool
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Address of Service:	Marian Hall, Ballinhassig, Co Cork
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Eircode:	T12 PN2X
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Name of Registered Provider:	Emma Higgins
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	06/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Administration Building, St Mary's Health Campus, Gurrabraher, Cork T23 X440
Inspection undertaken by:	D Prendergast
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

Emma's Playschool is registered to accommodate children aged 2 to 6 years, on a sessional basis. Children can avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme from 9.00am to 12.00pm, each Monday to Friday, over 38 weeks of the year.

The setting is located in the village of Ballinhassig and operates from a room within a community hall. Adjoining sanitary facilities are provided and there is an outdoor play space available beside the premises.

Staffing

The service employs three adults, all of whom are involved in the direct care of the children. This includes the registered provider. Two of the three staff members were present on the day of the 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 -

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

Statutory Notices

Notice	Date Served	Detail
Improvement Notice IN1883	06/05/2026	On review of the staff files, it was noted that police vetting was unavailable for one staff member, who was not onsite.
Status	The registered provider submitted a written response with detailed corrective and preventive actions, which were accepted by the Inspectorate.	
Improvement Notice IN1884	06/05/2026	On review of the staff attendance records, it was noted that a member of staff with First Aid Response (FAR) training was not available to the children at all times.
Status	The registered provider submitted a written response with detailed corrective and preventive actions, which were accepted by the Inspectorate.	

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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
- (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.
- (3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.
- (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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of operating the early years service and a named deputy had also been appointed, to deputise in her absence.
 - (b) The registered provider was present throughout the inspection process. Examination of the staff attendance records indicated that either the person in charge or the deputy were on duty during the hours of operation.
- (2) Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the registered provider, it was determined that one adult had commenced working at the setting, since the previous inspection on 27 November 2023. This staff file was given focus.

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- (a) One of the two required written references was from a past employer.
- (b) The second reference had been provided by a source other than a past employer.
- (c) A Garda vetting disclosure had been obtained for the staff member.
- (4) The adult had achieved a major award in early childhood care and education, as listed on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

Records of validation were unavailable for the two references on file in respect of the staff member.

(d)

See statutory notice section in relation to Improvement Notice IN1883 served.

(3)

As per part (2)(a)(b) above, records of validation were not on file before the adult commenced their role at the setting.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b)

The written reply stated that both references have been validated and that a record of these validations has been added to the staff file. Going forward, the registered provider will ensure that all references are validated, documented and stored in the staff file, prior to the staff member commencing work. A reference validation document has been created to assist with this process.

(3)

The registered provider has created a document to record the validation of references. This document will form part of the recruitment process, therefore ensuring that references will be validated prior to any staff member commencing work at the setting.

Supporting documentation submitted

(2)(a)(b) Two references validation records.

(3) A copy of the reference validation form.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted are accepted in meeting the regulatory requirements.

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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.*
- (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 all times during the period of inspection, it was observed that there was an adequate number of staff working directly with children.
- (3) The adult child ratio was correct on the day of the unannounced inspection. The room was in operation as follows:
There were 18 children, aged 3 to 5 years in attendance and 2 adults were working directly with these children.

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)

Basic needs:

- The mid-morning snack was accommodated shortly after 11.00am. This was observed to be a social occasion, as the children sat and chatted together and were afforded plenty of time to eat and drink.
- Reusable water bottles, which belonged to the children, were stored on top of a low-level fridge, where they could be easily seen and retrieved by the children, as needed, throughout the day.

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- The children independently accessed the adjoining sanitary facilities, and staff members were noted to provide appropriate assistance where required.
- Any child who wished to rest or relax could avail of the spacious cosy area, as needed.
- Tissues were provided within the care room, which supported children to carry out self-care and personal hygiene tasks.
- The generously sized care room facilitated the free movement of children, as they initiated their chosen activities and explored materials. Active play in the outdoor area was also accommodated during the morning.

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 bright care room was decorated with colourful learning charts and included a wall display of the children's birthdays.
- There was an adequate amount of suitably sized tables and chairs available for the children's use.
- The positioning of play resources on low-level shelving units supported ease of access by the children.
- Clearly defined interest areas were evident, with play materials grouped together according to their use.
For example:
 - the home area was equipped with wooden kitchen units, play food, utensils, dolls and accessories.
 - handheld vehicles were stored alongside car garages.
 - construction materials such as hard hats, play tools, building blocks and train sets were accessible in the same area.
 - resources that promoted fine motor skills, such as jigsaws, threading materials and connectable shapes, were also displayed together.
- There was a wide variety of interest items available, as well as a multiplicity of materials. This included two large, furnished dolls houses, a broad range of handheld vehicles, several cash registers, dolls and jigsaws.

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- Outdoors, the children were observed using ride on toys, slides, swings and climbing frames. A sheltered area was also provided.

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

- Parents and caregivers supplied the children's snacks for the sessional period. At the time of inspection, such foods were observed to include rice cakes, crackers, wraps, yogurts and a selection of fruit, with water to drink.
- The inspector was advised that none of the children who attended the setting had any food allergies or intolerances.
- During discussion, the registered provider confirmed that if a child were to express hunger outside of routine mealtimes, they would be accommodated to select something to eat from their lunch box.

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:

- Upon the inspector's arrival at the service, the main entrance door was found to have been secured and was maintained secure when not in use. This safety precaution curtailed the risk of unauthorised access and also reduced the risk of a child exiting the premises.
- In the outdoor play space, an enclosure was created through high-level fencing and a gate.
- Cables and flexes from electric equipment were maintained out of the children's reach.

Infection control:

- The children were noted to wash their hands after using the sanitary facilities, after outdoor play and before eating.

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- The children's perishable snacks were observed to be refrigerated, which ensured that such snacks were maintained within the recommended temperature range of 0°C to 5°C.
- Children's coats and bags were stored on individually labelled wall hooks, above floor level.
- An adult was noted to sanitise the tables before the mid-morning snack.

Fire safety:

- Firefighting equipment was secured.
- Fire exits were observed to be free from any obstructions.
- Fire exit signage was illuminated.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection control:

In the staff sanitary facility, a lidded, foot pedal operated bin was not available for the hygienic disposal of waste. An open waste bin was in use. This increased the risk of cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

A pedal bin for the teachers' toilet has been purchased. The registered provider will ensure that all bins within the setting are foot pedal operated.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence.

Summary Comment

The corrective action implemented by the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 23.

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

(2)

- (a) A first aid box was stored in an area that was easily accessible by adults, while out of reach of children.
- (b) The first aid box was available at all times, for use as needed.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1) See statutory notice section in relation to Improvement Notice IN1884 served.

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 firefighting 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)

- (b) A list of the number and type of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms was on file. According to the documentation available, the fire alarm system was tested on 14 April 2026 and the firefighting equipment was checked on 12 August 2025.
- (4) A notice, outlining the steps to be taken in the event of a fire, was displayed on the care room wall.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

- (a) While it was acknowledged that a fire drill had been undertaken on 27 April 2026, monthly fire drills were not consistently conducted. There were no fire drills recorded for the months of October 2025 or February 2026. The registered provider had advised of this, prior to presenting the records for review. Fire drills should be conducted on a monthly basis, to ensure that children and staff members are familiar with safe fire evacuation procedures.

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Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider recently completed fire marshal safety training and going forward, will ensure that fire drills are carried out on a monthly basis. As a preventive measure, reminders have been added to the school diary and to the laptop, for each month. This will ensure that monthly fire drills will not be missed in future.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the certificate for the fire marshal training and a screen shot of the fire drill reminder.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider is accepted in meeting the requirements of the regulation.