

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CE055
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Name of Service:	Happy Hippo's Pre-School
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Address of Service:	Cratloekeel, Cratloe, Co. Clare
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Eircode:	V95 A5YW
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Name of Registered Provider:	Elaine Counihan
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	05/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	29	PM	27
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Tusla Child and Family Agency Primary Care Centre Station Road Ennis County Clare.
Inspection undertaken by:	A. McCarthy
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

Happy Hippo's Pre-School was established in 2007 as a privately operated full day, part-time and sessional childcare facility in Cratloe, County Clare. The service provides care for children ranging in age from six months to six years, Monday to Friday from 07:30 to 18:00. A school aged childcare service is provided each morning and afternoon in a prefabricated modular structure to the rear of the building.

The service is facilitated in a two-storey house that has been modified. The baby room, adjacent sleep room, the toddler room and the kitchen are located on the ground floor. The playful tigers and the happy monkey's rooms and are located on the first floor. The care rooms include: the baby room (age range: eight months to eighteen months of age), the toddler room (age range: one to three years), the playful tigers (age range: three to five years) and the happy monkeys (age range: three to four years). The outdoor play areas for the preschool children are available to the side of the premises. The school aged childcare is located to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

Eleven adults are employed by the service. On the 05 March 2026 the registered provider worked alongside four adults to care for the children and an auxiliary person prepared, cooked and served the hot meal. The registered provider is the owner and the manager of the service and works in the service as an administrator, provides relief in the rooms and collects and drops off the children to the local national school.

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:

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- 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 and safety and premises and facilities. The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations:

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment (1)(a)(b), (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) and (4)

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels (1) (3) (8)(a)

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child (1)(a)

Regulation 23 -Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 25 - First aid (1)

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures (1)(a)(b)(4)

Regulation 28 – Insurance

Regulation 29 – Premises (c)(e)

Regulation 30 - Minimum space requirements (2)

These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report. 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.

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Additional Information

05 March 2026

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider to respond to a significant risk found under Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child under General Safety. The surface of the radiators in four care rooms exceeded the recommended temperature of 50 °Celsius. This posed a potential risk of a burn injury to the children.

06 March 2026

Written and photographic evidence was provided to the Early Years Inspectorate outlining corrective and preventive measures taken to resolve the risk identified on inspection. Refer to Regulation 23 General Safety for further information.

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*

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(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 registered provider was the person in charge, and a person was available to deputise in their absence.

(b)

The registered provider and a named person to deputise was available at all times during the inspection.

(2)

Eleven files were available in respect of the registered provider and the adults employed by the service. The findings included the following:

(a)

Ten written and validated references from past employers in respect of adults working in the service were available.

(b)

Twelve written and validated references were available in respect of adults working in the service from a source other than a past employer.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the eleven adults employed by the service. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

International police vetting was available in respect of two adults working in the service who had not lived in another state for a period longer than six months as an adult.

(4)

The nine adults working directly with the preschool children held Early Childhood Care and Education qualifications ranging from Level 5 to Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Part III – Management and Staff

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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)

During the inspection an adequate number of adults worked directly with the children in attendance.

(2)

On the 05 March 2026 the ratio of adults caring for children was maintained. Five adults cared for the twenty-nine children in attendance in the morning and four adults cared for twenty-seven children in attendance in the afternoon.

(8)(a)

The staff roster indicated that more than two adults were available in the service at all times.

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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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Supporting Relationships Around Children:

Positive behavioural strategies were used during interactions observed between the adults and children. The adults working directly with the children demonstrated a knowledge of the children's preferences and capabilities. The transitions from play based activities, to sleep and mealtime were completed with ease. The adults worked effectively together to meet the care needs of the children in each room. The children were observed to seek the support of adults when needed and were responded to promptly. The adults were observed to cuddle, comfort and soothe the children prior to sleep. The adults engaged with the children in individual and group-based activities. The children were encouraged to be independent and observed to help each other, and this was encouraged and praised by the adults. The registered provider stated that an open-door policy is in place in the service. Parents were communicated with in an informal manner during the children's arrival and departure to the service. Learning journals captured the children's activities and artwork and are shared with parents throughout the school term.

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:

- A bell operated system, with a high-level exit switch were in place at the entrance door. The registered provider monitored the safe entry and exit of the children to and from the service.

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- The outdoor area was secured and enclosed with a surrounding perimeter fencing and a gate to protect the children within.
- The children were signed in and out on arrival to and departure from the service by the registered provider on the childcare electronic application system.
- Storage facilities were secured and inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

- The service was maintained in a clean condition.
- The children's and adult's sanitary facilities were appropriately equipped with warm running water, liquid soap, hand paper towels and lidded, lined and pedal operated bins.
- The children washed their hands at appropriate intervals after activities, after using the toilet and before mealtime.
- The infant's powdered formula was reconstituted in accordance with best practice guidance and stored in the refrigerator in the care room.
- The children's bedlinen and personal care items were labelled and stored individually.
- The children's soothers were stored in individually labelled containers, and a sterilising system was available.

Fire Safety:

- Records of completed monthly fire drills are available in the service.
- The fire exits and routes were clear from obstruction throughout the service.
- The fire assembly point and the fire exit route signage were readily identifiable and known to the adults working in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

Immediate Action Notice

General Safety:

1. On the 05 March 2026 an immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider that posed a risk of a burn injury. The surface of radiators in the Playful Tigers room, the Happy Monkeys room, the Baby room and the Sleep room adjacent to the Baby room measured in excess of the recommended temperature of 50 ° Celsius. The radiators were accessible to the pre-school children in each of the care rooms. The surface measurements of the radiators are detailed in the box below:

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Room Names:	Radiator Surface Temperatures:
Baby Room:	53 °Celsius
Baby Sleep Room:	68.6 °Celsius
Happy Monkeys	55.4 °Celsius
Playful Tigers	51.2 °Celsius

Infection Control:

- Four mattresses in the standard sized cots did not have wipeable protective covers. This posed a potential risk of cross infection.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

- After the inspection 05 March 2026. The registered provider purchased, installed and secured to the wall radiator covers to rectify the risks set out in the safety immediate action notice. The registered provider removed the portable radiator.

Going forward a daily risk assessment will be completed. The addition of the radiator covers has been added and recorded for review on the service's risk assessment.

Infection Control:

- A spare wipeable mattress was placed in one cot after the inspection and three more wipeable mattresses have been ordered and will be placed in cots once received. A record of the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines will be retained, and time frame as and when to replace the mattress will be adhered to or replaced if in state of disrepair.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- Photographic evidence.

Infection Control:

- Photographic evidence.
- Receipt of payment for three mattresses.

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Summary Comment

Based on the corrective and preventive measures and supporting evidence the area of non-compliance is addressed under Regulation 23 General Safety. The implemented actions will be reviewed on next inspection.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)
Two adults held a record of up to date First Aid Responder training. The staff roster indicated that the two adults were available on the premises at all times.

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)
Records were available to demonstrate that monthly fire drills were carried out by the service. The last fire drill took place on the 25 February 2026.

(b)
Up-to-date records of the number, type and maintenance service were available for the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system. The most recent service of the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system took place respectively on the 21 March 2025 and 20 March 2025.

(4)

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Fire action notices were displayed demonstrating the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VI – Safety

Regulation 28 – Insurance

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

Compliance Information

Up to date insurance cover was available for thirty-seven pre-school children attending the childcare service. The insurance policy for the sessional service is valid until the 27 March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 – Premises

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

(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

(e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.

Compliance Information

(c)

The service was adequately lit by means of natural lighting supplemented by artificial lighting. The service was heated by means of a gas heating system. The ambient temperatures of the care room and the sanitary accommodation were within the optimum care room temperature range of 18 to 22°Celsius. Natural ventilation is available in the care rooms and sanitary facilities.

(e)

The children had access to sanitary facilities adjacent to the Toddler room on the ground floor and adjacent to the Happy Monkey room on the first floor. The sanitary facilities were appropriately equipped with three child sized toilets and two wash hand basins. The nappy changing facility was equipped with a nappy changing mat, and nappy changing procedures were displayed. Two sanitary facilities were available for use by the adults in the pre-school service and in the prefabricated structure to the rear of the service.

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Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 30 - Minimum space requirements

(2) A registered provider of a full day care service or a part-time day care service shall ensure that the minimum amount of clear floor space specified in column (3) of Schedule 7 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Schedule in respect of the age range of children specified in column (2) thereof at that reference number is available for each child in that age range attending the service.

Compliance Information

(2)
On the 05 March 2025 adequate clear floor space was provided for the pre-school children attending the four care rooms on a full day care basis. The care rooms were measured, and the measurements are detailed in the box below:

Room Names:	Measurements of Rooms:
Baby Room	17.22 m ²
Toddler Room	33.12 m ²
Playful Tigers	16.88 m ²
Happy Monkeys	15.88 m ²