

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW004
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Name of Service:	Apple Tree Pre-School
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Address of Service:	Slate Row Hall, Hacketstown, Co. Carlow
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Eircode:	R93 PX93
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary Kealy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	24/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	16	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow.
Inspection undertaken by:	Norma Thornton
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

Apple Tree Pre-School is a private pre-school service which operates from Slate Row community hall on the outskirts of the rural village of Hacketstown in north county Carlow. The service has one large classroom designated specifically for the pre-school with adjacent toilet facilities and a designated secure outdoor area to the side of the carpark at the back of the premises. The service also has full use of the main community hall for large group physical activities during times of inclement weather when they cannot go outside. Children attending the service are aged 2 to 6 years and attend for a sessional early childhood care and education (ECCE) session from 09:30 to 12:30 hours, Monday to Friday for 38 weeks of the calendar year.

Staffing

There are three staff members including the registered provider working directly with the children attending the service. All three staff members hold qualifications in early childhood care and education ranging from Level 5 to Level 8 on the national Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) framework.

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.

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A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations.

Regulation 15-Record of a Pre-School Child,

Record 19- Health, Welfare and Development of Child,

Record 23- Safeguarding the Health, Safety and Welfare of Child,

Regulation 24- Checking In and Out and Record of Attendance.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the classroom and outdoor play area.

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, person in charge, 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,*

(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 named designated person in charge in the service and was present for the duration of the inspection. There was a named deputy designated person available to deputise as required, who was also present.

(b) The staff roster demonstrated that the designated person in charge or a named deputy designated person in charge, was always onsite while the service was in operation.

(2) Staff files for three staff members, including the registered provider were reviewed by the inspector.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available on file for each of the staff members from either a past employer or from a reputable source.

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(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all three staff members including the registered provider. The registered provider demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Not applicable as there was no staff member employed in the service who had lived outside of the state for a period of longer than six months.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available for inspection, for each staff member, who as part of their role were working directly with the children, demonstrating that each staff member held at least a minimum Level 5 to Level 8 qualification in early childhood care and education on the national QQI Framework.

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) The inspector observed from the service's attendance records that the registered provider ensured that there was always an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) There were 16 pre-school children aged 3 to 5 years directly supervised by 3 staff members throughout the inspection.

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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

On review of a sample of 12 pre-school child records, the inspector observed that all details as required from (1)(a) to (i) were recorded for each of the 12 pre-school children's records.

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*

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

- (b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.*

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Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)

Throughout observation of the sessional early childhood care and education (ECCE) session provided in the service the inspector observed that the children had access to a variety of age-appropriate activities and physical environments both in the classroom and outdoor play area.

The children spent the start of their ECCE session playing freely in the outdoor area in the outdoor kitchen, construction area and physical activities which encouraged development of their physical motor skills.

The natural hedgerow and planting in the outdoor play area provided children with flowers such as daffodils and primroses to decorate the imaginary cakes that they were making from the natural wood chip which covered the outdoor surface. Children informed the inspector how the daffodils and primroses smelt “fabulous”. The outdoor kitchen provided children with open ended materials such as pots and kettles which they used to cook imaginary meals and pour water from.

The inspector observed that all the children wore the same waterproof, cosy outdoor all-in -one suit in navy with wellies in a variety of sizes also being provided by the service. The registered provider informed the inspector that this ensured that there was provision of appropriate outdoor wear for every child attending the service.

Children enjoyed the physical challenge of balancing on wooden beams, cycling their balance bikes along smooth flat planks and supporting each other, while they jumped from a low stack of secured wooden pallets, holding each other’s hand as they jumped together, celebrating joyously “being brave”. The early years educators praised the children on their physical achievements, for trying new challenges while supporting each other in doing so.

Children excitedly showed the inspector their fairy garden, music area and artificial grass covered wooden house in the outdoor play area, where they could rest and relax in when needed a break from the physical activities.

After outdoor play the children were able to confidently inform the inspector of what was next on their daily schedule as they transitioned to the large community hall where they changed from their outdoor clothes before going into their classroom to wash their hands in the adjacent bathroom facilities.

Once the children had all washed their hands, the took a pause break where they all enjoyed some minutes resting their heads on their arms in dim lighting before the staff moved onto the next class activity. Children informed the inspector that their class had a teddy bear called “Réalta”, whom they took in turns to take home each evening. As the bear went on adventures with each child, the class contributed photographs of activities and stories of activities to create a class story book. The story of “Réalta” also included some words as gaeilge such as “ag snámh”, “ag léim” agus “ag rith” as the staff introduced the children to the Irish language in the classroom activities. After reciting an Irish poem together and listening to an animated story from one of the staff, the children decided it was time for snack, which they all assisted in preparing for. Tables were cleaned, tablecloths

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laid with flower vases. Once children had washed their hands again and sat down at the tables, they responded to their friends whose turn it was to hand out each child's lunch boxes. At each of the three tables, one staff member sat with the children, also having their snack and enjoying conversations with the children.

All the children had healthy snacks bought from home consisting of sandwiches, pancakes, crackers, fruit, cheese and yogurts. Every child had fresh water of a lightly concentrated fruit drink with their break. Staff supported the children with opening packaging or lunch containers when required.

During snack time it was obvious that one child who had a great interest in the weather forecast updated their friends and the staff on what type of weather and information about a weather warning that was predicted for the coming days. The staff were observed to extend the learning from the weather discussion by subtly engaging children in how bad weather would affect farming and the arrival of spring lambs. The children discussed how sheep would be brought into warm sheds with clean straw and that they had special "warming boxes" to help keep newborn lambs warm. The children also discussed how sometimes it was sad as sometimes lambs get sick and die. The staff encouraged the children to discuss how this made the children feel sad but also how the happy healthy lambs bouncing around the feels made them feel joy.

After snack time children participated in an Easter card making activity which the inspector observed documented in the staff's short term curricular planning. The children drew, coloured and selected Easter themed stickers to decorate the cards for their families with. Individual children's learning journals recorded all the activities that the children had participated in since commencing in the service the previous September. These activities correlated to the staffs documented curricular planning, with evidence of children's current artwork and projects displayed in the classroom.

The staff and children further developed their ideas and creativity into stories that supported children's learning, for example over the past Christmas period, a character developed by the staff and children "Gerry the Gingerbread" had been incorporated into a visual festive story book / learning journal whereby Gerry went on exciting visits to various community places / people during the time leading up to Christmas, for example helping in the post office with all the extra Christmas post, in the local supermarket, the chemist, hardware store, doctor's surgery, fire station, recycling centre, Garda station, hairdresser, primary and secondary schools. In this way the children became familiar with the important places and people who contributed to their community on a daily basis through the "Gerry the Gingerbread" story.

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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 service's main entrance was located at the back of the service via the main community hall door with access authorised to the building by staff present. The outdoor play area was secured with a natural boundary and a green metal child height metal fence and secured entrance/exit gate.

The inspector observed that all cleaning products were stored safely out of the reach of children in a secure storage cupboard in the kitchen area which could only be accessed by staff members.

Infection Control:

There were two appropriate child sized toilets provided for the children in attendance with adequate child height handwash basin. A separate staff toilet was also available. The inspector observed that both the staff and children frequently washed their hands, prior to snack time, following outdoor play, messy play, blowing noses into tissues and after using the toilet facilities.

Administration of Medication:

The staff in the service explained to the inspector that prescribed medications were rarely required to be administered during the service and at the time of inspection there were no children on prescribed emergency medications. The staff demonstrated to the inspector that they were well informed regarding correct administration of medication procedures, in line with the service's administration of medication policy if a child required temperature reducing or prescribed medications.

Outing:

The registered provider informed the inspector that the service does not operate outings away from the service.

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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-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

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

Compliance Information

(1) On review of the service's attendance records, the inspector observed that children's daily attendance, times of arrival and departure were recorded by staff daily.

(3)(a) Staff ensured that no other persons, other than the children attending the service, parents/ guardians dropping and collecting children, employees or other workers employed in the service could enter the service without authorisation from a staff member.

(b) A daily visitor record book was maintained by the service which the early years inspector was requested to complete.

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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) There were two staff members employed in the service with current First Aid Responder (FAR) training. The designated person in charge ensured that there were at least two staff members accredited with FAR training, present in the service for the ECCE session while the preschool children were in attendance.
- (2)(a)(b) A first aid box was available, stored in clear view. The first aid box was observed to be adequately supplied and was always available to the staff for the children in the service.

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.*
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-*
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,*
 - (b) an employee, and*
 - (c) an authorised person.*
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.*

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Compliance Information

(1) A record in writing was maintained on the premises of the following:

- (a) Fire drills were carried out in the service monthly with the details recorded. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 13 March 2025.
- (b) The last maintenance check of the fire-fighting equipment and for the fire alarm system check was recorded as having taken place on the 24 October 2025.
- (4) A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed on the notice board.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate displaying adequate insurance for a sessional ECCE service for up to 22 preschool children was displayed on the notice board in the service.

The insurance certificate provided cover from 28 March 2025 to the 27 March 2026.