

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW015
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Name of Service:	Dolmen Nursery and Montessori School
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Address of Service:	Montessori School, 6 Dolmen Gardens, Hacketstown Road, Carlow, Co. Carlow
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Name of Registered Provider:	Linda Mellon
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	10/04/2025
Date of regulatory compliance meeting	14/07/2025

No of pre-school children:	AM	20	PM	15
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Primary Care Centre, Castle Park, Arklow, Co. Wicklow Y14 AE10
Inspection undertaken by:	L O' Connor
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

Dolmen Nursery and Montessori is a full day care service located on the outskirts of Carlow town. The service operates from converted residential property. At the time of inspection, the service was registered to accommodate 27 children aged 0 to 6 years old. The service operates from 7.30am to 6.15pm Monday to Friday. There are four care rooms within the service; the Baby room (0 to 2 years), Toddler room (1 to 3 years), Playschool room (2.5 years to 4 years) and Montessori room (3 to 5 years).

The service has a kitchenette which is adjoining the Playschool room for the storing, preparing and cooking food. A sleep room with four cots is available for the children. The outdoor area is adjoining the Toddler room and located to the rear of the premises.

The service also runs a school age care service which is registered separately.

Staffing

The service employs seven adults to work directly with the children. This does not include the registered provider who does not work directly with the children. On the day of inspection, there were six adults working with the children.

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management and recruitment, Regulation 11 -Staffing, Regulation 16 Record in relation to pre-school service, Regulation 19. Health, welfare and development of child Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child Regulation 25 - First Aid and Regulation 26 - Fire Safety Measures. However, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified Regulation 29 Premises. 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.

Additional Information

An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the service on 11 April 2025 in relation to Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child. It was deemed that there was potential immediate risk to the safety of the children due to fire safety and safe sleep practices observed during the inspection. The registered provider provided responses on the 11 and 14 April 2025. Please refer to Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child.

A referral was made to the Fire Officer on 16 April 2025 due to potential fire safety risks within the service.

The registered provider submitted a proposed change in circumstances on 11 July 2025 to amend the age profile of children which the service caters from 0 to 6 years old to 1 to 6 years old. This change commenced on 28 July 2025.

A Regulatory Compliance Meeting was held on 14 July 2025 with the registered provider to discuss the findings of inspection.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, 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*
- (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 service had a designated person in charge of the service and a named staff member was appointed to deputise when required.
 - (b) The person in charge was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service and was present for the duration of the inspection.

(2) A total of eight files were reviewed and the following was noted:

- (a)(b) Written validated references were available for the eight adults from a previous employer and/or a source other than a previous employer.
- (c) The required Garda Vetting disclosures were in place for the eight adults. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, please refer to Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child.

Non-Compliance Information

- (2)
 - (d) Police vetting was required for four adults and two were available for review. Evidence of police vetting was not available for one staff member who required it. While there was a police vetting record available for another staff member, it was not evidenced that this had been considered as it had not been translated.
- (3) Recruitment and vetting procedures were not carried out in advance of appointment for all staff. The service did not consider the police vetting for two staff prior to their appointment.
- (4) It is acknowledged that seven of the adults held 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. However, evidence was not available to demonstrate that one adult had the required qualification.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1)
 - (d) One of the police vetting records has been translated and the other staff member no longer works in the service. All documents for recruitment will be in place prior to the appointment of staff going forward/ added to staff files.
 - (3) All documents for recruitment will be in place prior to the appointment of staff going forward and added to staff files. A checklist is now in place for manager and deputy to complete before the commencement of new staff

(4) The staff member is currently awaiting their certificate from QQI and this will be submitted to the Inspectorate as soon as it is received.

Supporting documentation submitted

Police vetting for two staff members and a staff file checklist. Certificate to demonstrate a suitable qualification for one staff member.

Summary Comment

Based on the actions and assurances provided by the registered provider, the regulatory requirement has been met for Regulation 9 Management and recruitment. The measures which are in place under Regulation 9 Management and recruitment will be assessed on the next inspection.

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.

Compliance Information

(2)

The adult to child ratio was maintained during the morning of the inspection. On arrival, the following was in place in the four care rooms;

- In the Montessori room, there was one adult working with 6 children aged 2 to 5 years.
- In the Playschool room, there was five children aged 2 to 4 years with one adult.
- In the Toddler room, two adults were working with five children aged 1 to 3 years.
- In the Baby room, there was one adult with three sleeping children aged 1 to 2 years.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) An adequate number of adults were not working with the children on the day of inspection. The following was observed;

- a. The person in charge confirmed the staff members assigned to prepare food for the children. On the day of inspection, the staff member working directly with six pre-school children was responsible for the preparation of the dinner for the children in the service. It is acknowledged that the kitchen is adjoining the Playschool room. However, at 11.20am the staff member was observed to prepare the dinner and was not directly available to the children in the playschool room.
 - b. Due to the nature and needs of the children within the baby and Playschool rooms, an additional adult was required to provide support at times. Staffing levels during mealtime in the Baby room impacted on care as reported on under Regulation 19. Health, welfare and development of child. For example,
 - At 10.25am, there was one child aged 1 – 2 years crying in the sleep room. At this time, the staff member was soothing another child to sleep in the Baby room. An additional staff member was required to provide support at this time.
 - At 10.35am, a child in the Playschool room went to the toilet which was located in the hallway of the service. It is acknowledged that the staff member was verbally checking with the child that they were okay. The child confirmed they required support from the staff member. The staff member left the care room to support the child. An additional staff member was required at this time to supervise the five children in the Playschool room and/or provide support to the child in the toilet.
- (2) The adult to child ratio was not maintained at all times in the afternoon. Between 12.50pm to 1.10pm, the two groups of children from the Playschool and Montessori room merged as one group. At this time, there was one adult in the outdoor area with twelve pre-school children aged 2 to 5 years attending on a full day care basis.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1) Extra staff have since been recruited to meet staffing levels and support the educators throughout the day.
 - a. An additional staff member was hired for the kitchen.
 - b. A change in circumstance form was submitted to the inspectorate on the 11 July 2025 outlining that the baby room ceased operation. The service now offers care for children from 1 year to 6 years.

(2) Extra staff have since been recruited to meet staffing levels and support the educators throughout the day. This is reflected on the roster submitted.

Supporting documentation submitted

Staff roster for the week of 25 July 2025 which included details of staff breaks, additional staff members and that the manager is available to provide support to care rooms.

Summary Comment

The actions and supporting documentation submitted demonstrate that additional staff members have been employed. The roster now details the staff breaks and the adult providing cover. Based on these assurances, the regulatory requirement has been met for Regulation 11 -Staffing.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Non-Compliance Information

- (i) A staff roster was available within the service however; it was not reflective of the staff members who were present within the service on the day of inspection. For example, one staff member who was present but not rostered to work and another staff member who recently left the service was rostered to work.
- (j) Details were not recorded of medication given to a child attending the service. It is noted that the service has an authorisation form for the administration of medication signed by the child’s parent and/or guardian which included the name and frequency of the medication. However, a record to detail the actual administration to include the child’s name, time, date, name of the medication, adult administering and adult witnessing was not available. The service’s policy did not detail the procedure to record the details in the

case where medication is administered by the service. This posed a risk as the details of when a child received medication may be unknown and it may affect the medical treatment provided to the child.

(k) A sample of accident and incident records were reviewed. The records were inconsistent and not completed with a staff signature or a parent signature. This was at variance of the service's accident and incident policy which stated that the records are completed with the staff signature and the parent signature when the child is collected from the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (i) In the case where a staff member leaves the service, without notice, when cover has been arranged the registered provider will immediately change roster to reflect staff working on the day.
- (j) The administration of medication forms will be changed back to the services original format as this format includes all details required.
- (k) Accident and incident forms will be filled correctly under management's supervision. At a recent staff meeting, sample Accident and incident forms were shown to staff members to outline the importance of correct recording. Accident & incident forms are now filled out in the presence of management to ensure correct recording and offer support if required.

Supporting documentation submitted

Medication consent form, completed accident and incident records.

Summary Comment

The regulatory requirement has been met for Regulation 16 - Record in relation to pre-school service and it will be assessed on the next inspection.

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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)

Children in the toddler, playschool and Montessori room were provided with opportunities for sensory play which included bubbles, water play, sand play, play with cornflour and playdough. These were provided to the children both indoors and outdoors on the day of the inspection. In the afternoon, children were provided with paintbrushes and water. The children were observed to paint the wooden fence and other wooden areas within the outdoor space. In discussion with staff members, the children's enjoyment of open-ended materials was recognised. This practice was reflective of the service's curriculum policy which recognised the role of multi-sensory experiences.

The interactions between the staff members and children were calm, unhurried and playful. The staff members provided children with time to think and respond, and provided verbal prompts as required. For example,

- In the Baby room, the staff member sat on the floor while one of the children was playing. The staff member used low tones and playfully described what the child was doing. For example, 'are you playing peep'. A few moments later, the staff member provided the child with some books and asked the child 'will we read a story?' and proceeded to read the story and turn the pages while the child sat on their lap.
- In the Toddler room, the staff member was preparing the children aged 1-3 years to go outdoors. Calmly, the staff member asked the children 'will we get the bubbles', the children exclaimed excitedly 'Yes!', the staff member smiled and proceeded bring the children outside. The children were observed to watch

attentively for the bubbles to appear and catch them. The staff member provided the children with prompts for their language throughout including 'is it gone too high?' and 'Did it go pop?'

- During nappy changing, the children in the Playschool room were overheard to engage in playful conversation with the staff member. One conversation was initiated by the child who shared with the staff member they were going to the moon and then to London. The staff member playfully engaged with the conversation asking how they would get there and how long they were going for. This practice was outlined within the service's curriculum which outlined staff are calm and gentle in their approach and offer encouragement to the children.
- In the Montessori room, the six children were playing with playdough. One child exclaimed 'this is Santa's beard'. The adult, who was close by, playfully responded asking the children if they could remember who was going to visit in the next couple of weeks? The children took a few moments to re-call and responded excitedly with the Easter Bunny. The conversation continued between the children and staff member of what the Easter Bunny does.

The service's curriculum policy outlined that children learn through an environment which is responsive and supportive. On the day of inspection, the children were observed to be supported to develop their problem-solving and negotiation skills. The staff members were overheard to provide the younger children with the language to begin to develop and refine this skill. For example, in the Playschool room while playing with the corn flour and animals, two children wanted to play with the same animal. The staff member remained close by and suggested for the child who was playing with the animal to say '[name of child] I was playing with that one, but I will find you a new one in the box'. The child was observed to find another animal which was similar and the two children continued with their play. The staff member provided support to the children throughout the morning, for example while playing in the water tray, one child exclaimed 'I want to play with the animals. The staff member smiled at the child and playfully replied saying 'of course you can, will you dry your hands first?'. These prompts by the staff members support the child to develop their skills of problem solving and are supportive children to enable children to develop a sense of independence.

In discussion with staff members, it was outlined that sleep is needs led by the child. The routine of the children was on display within the Baby room which described the sleep routine of the individual children. On the day of

inspection, the children from the Baby room were provided with an opportunity to sleep in a cot, as required. This practice was reflective of the service's safe sleep policy which outlined that the child's usual sleeping practices are known and that sleep is based on children's need, choices and routine.

The service's policy outlined that outdoor play was an important part of the daily curriculum at the service. The children from the toddler, playschool and Montessori room engaged in play in the outdoor area at various times during the inspection. The children played as one group while outdoors which was reflective of the service's policy which outlined that outdoor play provided a time for children to socialise freely. The staff members explained that the children enjoyed playing as one group as it gave the different age groups time to play together. In the outdoor area, the children were provided with a sheltered area with sand trays and play kitchens. In the open area, the children had access to a slide, play house, a wooden car structure and a basketball net. Additional materials were available within the shed. While outdoors, the children engaged in various play and activities. For example, at 2.30pm the children were playing in the sand tray, building towers with wooden blocks, parachute play, reading books and playing football. This was reflective of the service policy which outlined that children have freedom and choice in the outdoor area of what they would like to play with.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic needs

1. The staffing level and equipment available did not support the needs of children in the Baby room during lunch time. There were two high chairs available for the three children aged 1 to 2 years old on the day of inspection. At 12.30pm, the staff member was observed to feed two of the three children their dinner in the high chairs. The third child sat on the floor between the high chairs and was observed to be crying. At 12.40pm, the staff member removed one of the children from the highchair and placed them onto the floor. This child was observed to become upset. The adult placed the third child into the high chair and began to feed them their dinner. At 1.10pm, the second child remained sitting between the two high chairs and was observed to be crying while the staff member fed the two other children in the highchairs. The lack of equipment and additional support did not promote a calm or child-led mealtime for three children in the Baby room.
2. The children aged 1 to 2 years in the Baby room were not observed to engage in outdoor play on the day of inspection. This was at variance with the service's outdoor play policy which stated that each child spends a minimum of 30 minutes outdoors every day, weather permitting. This practice may limit the play and development opportunities for the children in the Baby room.

Physical and Material Environment

3. Rest areas for children were not in place within the four care rooms to support children to rest or retreat from the group as required.
 4. Equipment and materials were not readily accessible to children and were limited in variety. The equipment did not provide opportunity for challenging, diverse, creative or enriching experiences for children within the baby, toddler and Montessori rooms in line with their stage of development. This was at variance of the service's policy which outlined that the materials and equipment is suitable and age appropriate, while providing new exciting challenges and experiences. The policy also outlined that the layout of the room is carefully designed and the equipment is accessible to the children to encourage free choice. The following was observed;
 - a. Staff did not ensure that a variety of equipment and toys were easily accessible to the babies to support their exploration and play. In the Baby room, the three children aged 1 to 2 years had access to one push/ pull toy, a mirror and a wall jigsaw. It is noted that play equipment was available in boxes on a shelving unit. However, as the children were continuing to develop their skills to crawl and walk, these materials were not easily accessible. It is noted that the staff members provide the children with story books and a box containing plastic toys during the inspection.
 - b. In the Toddler room, the jigsaws were stacked on the shelving unit and were not easily accessible for the children. There was a play kitchen in the room too, however, there were no supporting materials including food or kitchen utensils to extend the children's play.
 - c. In the Montessori room, the children had access to Montessori equipment, art easel, blocks jigsaws, and a sensory table. There was also children's dress up clothes, however, these were stored in a plastic box.
- (b)
5. Staffing allocation did not align with the service's policy objective to support the development of relationships between the staff members and children. The service's behaviour management policy outlined that there was a key worker system in place within the service to support the development of

secure, trusting relationships between staff members, the children and parents/guardians. The policy outlined that the key worker system supported children's care routines such as mealtimes, sleep and the personal care of the child and when the key person was absent, there was a secondary key worker available who was familiar to the children. It is noted that the person in charge outlined there was a transition of staff happening between care rooms. However, on the day of inspection, within the Baby room there were five staff members intermittently working with the three children aged 1 to 2 years old. In discussion with staff members, this routine was in place on a daily basis.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The baby room ceased operation from 11 July 2025. Additional staff members have been recruited to provide support in rooms throughout mealtimes. This is visible on the roster.
2. The baby room has closed since 11 July 2025. However, the manager reiterated the importance of daily outdoor play to staff members and support is available from the manager on helping the children while outside. All children will have unlimited daily access to the outdoor area and daily outdoor play will be stressed to staff members at the next planned meeting.
3. Each room has a defined rest area. The manager will carry out regular ad hoc checks in all rooms to ensure rest areas are available and maintained at all times.
4. The service is engaged with a quality support mentor who will provide guidance and direction regarding the environments within the service. More diverse materials are being sourced. The registered provider will also source natural, diverse, and creative age-appropriate materials for all rooms. Creative materials will be accessible and will be at a low level for all children. The service will provide more real-life materials to the home area and display them in an inviting manner for the children. The service will provide natural age-appropriate materials in all rooms. And the dress up clothing will be hung up in a more captivating manner.
5. The service is engaged with a quality support mentor who will provide guidance regarding a key worker system. Each child and group of children have a key worker assigned.

Supporting documentation submitted

Key worker system in place with names of staff members and groups of children. Communication with staff regarding rest areas. Photographs of shelving units with accessible materials and equipment in the Baby and Toddler room.

Summary Comment

The regulatory requirement for Regulation 19. Health, welfare and development of child has been met. Based on the actions and supporting documentation submitted, the Inspectorate is assured that the registered provider has put measures into place to address the findings on inspection. This regulation will be assessed on the next inspection.

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 mealtimes in the toddler, playschool and Montessori rooms were calm and unhurried. The children from these rooms were provided with a snack at 10am which included yogurt, fruit, breadsticks and milk. For dinner at 12pm, the children were provided with homemade pasta and vegetables. For dinner time, the children from the playschool and Montessori room ate their dinner as one group. The children appeared to enjoy the dinner with staff providing additional food as requested. In the Toddler room, the children wore bibs and were provided with sufficient time to develop the skill of self-feeding with the staff member providing support as required. For the younger children in the Baby room, the texture of the dinner was altered as required, for example one child's dinner was pureed. Staff members were observed to provide a warm and comforting experience to the younger children while bottle feeding. An adult sized chair was available within the Baby room. While holding the child, the staff members used low tones and reassuring facial expressions which included smiling. The tea time snack consisted of homemade ham sandwiches and pears at 3.30pm. The staff members were observed to sit with the children during the mealtimes. Throughout the inspection, children had access to, and were encouraged by staff members, to get a drink of water. The mealtimes were reflective of the 3-week menu plan which was on display in the service.

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 internal doors, including the door to the kitchen adjoining the Playschool room, was secured throughout the inspection. On arrival to the service, the entry and exit points to the service were secured.
- The low-level windows within the care rooms were appropriately secured with a safety mechanism.
- The two high chairs in the Baby room were in good condition with the appropriate safety harnesses in place.
- Large equipment including play kitchens were appropriately anchored and secured.
- The surface in the garden was maintained appropriately and there were no worn areas.
- On the day of inspection, staff members were observed to re-apply sunscreen to the children throughout the inspection. The children wore appropriate clothing, which included sun hats while outdoors. This was reflective of the service's outdoor play and administration of medication policies.

Infection Control:

- Staff members outlined that children who sleep in cots have their own individual bed linen. On the day of inspection, the linen was observed to be changed prior to a different child sleeping in the cot. This was reflective of the service's safe sleep and infection control policies.
- The cots were 50cm apart within the sleep room and the cot mattresses were all in good condition with the recognised safety standard.

Safe Sleep:

- Children who were under two years old were provided with a standard cot and cellular blankets for sleep.

Non-Compliance Information

Fire Safety:

1. The fire safety measures in place within the service posed a potential immediate risk to children. An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the service on 11 April 2025 due to the following observations;

- a. It was confirmed that monthly fire drills do not take place with the children in the Baby and Toddler room. The staff members outlined that the children from the pre-school and Montessori rooms take part in the fire drills. The date of the last fire drill for the children in the Baby and Toddler room was unknown to staff members and the person in charge. This was at variance with the service's fire safety policy which outlined that monthly fire drills are conducted, with all children in the service.
- b. The service fire safety policy outlined that staff are provided with training to ensure that they are aware of the procedure to be followed in the case of a fire. In discussion with staff members, they described the route to take in the event of an emergency, however, this was at variance with the actual route in place.
- c. The route identified as the fire exit for when the children were in the back garden was blocked with two bikes/trikes and a large piece of wood. This was not in line with the service's fire safety policy which stated that escape routes are free from obstruction to ensure that they could be used safely and effectively at all times.
- d. The service's policy outlined that the attendance record is used in the event of an emergency evacuation. However, the attendance record was not maintained as children were collected from the service. At 3.20pm, there were 15 pre-school children in the service, however, there were 20 children marked as present.

The above risks were brought to the attention of the person in charge by the early years inspector during the inspection on 10 April 2025. Responses detailing the immediate actions taken by the service was received from the registered provider on 11 and 14 April 2025.

2. The fire escape route within the sleep room was impeded by the storage of stackable beds which were located at the door. This posed a risk of safe evacuation in the event of an emergency.

Safe Sleep:

3. The sleep practices within the service posed a potential immediate risk to the children aged 1 – 3 years in the sleep room. These practices were at variance with the service's safe sleep policy. An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the service on 11 April 2025. The following was observed;

- a. Sleep checks were not consistently carried out every 10 minutes by the staff members while four children aged 1-3 years slept in the sleep room throughout the inspection. The service's safe sleep policy outlined that sleeping infants/children would be checked, every 10 minutes, by assigned staff.
- b. Sleep records for children were not completed. For example, three children aged 1-2 years were asleep from 10.40am. At 11.05am the sleep records were as follows;
 - Two records did not detail sleep checks from 10.40am;
 - One record did not detail any time the child went to sleep and/or sleep checks which took place.

This was at variance with the service's safe sleep policy which outlined that sleep information would be recorded on a sleep chart following a 10-minute sleep check.
- c. There was no means of ensuring the temperature within the sleep room was maintained between 18- 22 °C as the thermometer was broken.

The above was brought to the attention of the person in charge by the early years inspector during the inspection. Responses detailing the immediate actions taken by the service was received from the registered provider on 11 and 14 April 2025.

4. The service's safe sleep policy outlined that the service used a monitor and physically entered the sleep room to carry out sleep checks. On the day of inspection, the staff members were observed to carry out sleep checks from a sliding window in the Baby room which was adjoining the sleep room. This does not support a thorough check on sleeping children. This practice is at variance with the service's policy on checking sleeping children.
5. The cot sheets on two of the three cot mattresses in the sleep room did not fit the mattresses as follows;
 - a. One of the cot sheets appeared to be too small and the mattress was upright on one corner. This created a foothold or means to climb out of the cot.
 - b. One cot sheet had excess material and appeared to be too large for the mattress.

This was at variance with the service's safe sleep policy which outlined the sleep room is risk assessed daily and that no loose bedding is used in cots. This practice posed a risk of injury to a child.

6. Children's footwear was not removed prior to sleep. In the Playschool room at 12.40pm six children aged 2-4 years old slept with their shoes or welly boots on them.

Infection Control:

7. Floor cushions were provided for the six children sleeping on the stackable beds. These cushions were not a suitable alternative for a pillow.
8. Individual bed linen was not provided for the stackable beds for the children in the Playschool room. This practice was at variance with the service's safe sleep and infection control policies which stated that bed linen is used on stackable beds and that each child has their own bed linen.
9. The water in the sanitary area for the children was cold to touch. This was at variance of the service's infection control policy which outlined that warm water was provided for handwashing. This increased the risk of the spread of infection as cold water may reduce the time spent by children while washing their hands.
10. The service's infection control policy outlined that children are provided with paper towel to dry their hands following handwashing. On the day of inspection, the children were provided with a communal hand towel in the sanitary area to dry their hands. This posed a risk of the spread of infection.
11. The nappy changing practices were inconsistent and at variance with the service's infection control policy. The following was observed;
- Staff members did not remove the apron between nappy changes,
 - Children's hands were not washed following a nappy change,
 - Adults did not wash their hands following each nappy change,
 - Gloves were worn on one hand.
- These practices posed an increased risk of the spread of infection.
12. The staff members assigned to prepare and cook food on the premises were observed to carry out nappy changing duties on the day of inspection. This was at variance with the service's infection control policy which outlined that staff undertaking nappy changes are not involved in the preparation, cooking or serving of food. This posed a risk of cross contamination.

13. The nappy changing bin was at variance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory notice issued in 2022 which required disposable nappies to be disposed of in a foot-operated, lined, lidded bin that is leak proof, sealable and easy to clean. A swing bin was in place in the nappy changing area.

14. The wood in nappy changing area was untreated with exposed and uneven areas. This posed an increased risk of infection as the surface could not be effectively cleaned.

General Safety:

15. The service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. On review two Garda Vetting disclosures were dated over 3 years ago.

16. The wood surface on three tables in the outdoor area was uneven with a splintered edge. This posed an increased risk of injury to a child. It is noted that the service had a risk assessment for the outdoor area. however, in discussion a completed risk assessment was not available.

17. The radiator cover in the Playschool room was not secured appropriately and posed a finger pinching risk to a child.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Fire Safety:

1. A response was provided to the Immediate Action Notice (IAN). The registered provider stated the below actions would be discussed at a meeting on 14/04/2025 held by the service manager. All staff members will be issued with a copy of safe sleep and Fire safety policies. And further to the arranged meeting, the registered provider will request staff members to sign and date they understand and agree to issued policies. Alongside these actions, the registered provider stated the following measures were also taken by the service;
 - (a) The service would complete a full centre fire drill on 15/04/2025.
 - (b) The fire assembly point has been explained and identified through a picture to staff members.
 - (c) Items blocking fire exits were removed and that all exits were clear as of 11/04/2025.
 - (d) The registered provider reiterated to staff the importance of signing out children in real time.

Through the CAPA response received on 29 May 2025, the registered provider stated monthly fire drills will take place. All fire exits will remain clear and the service will ensure this going forward. The registered provider stated they are willing to Liaise with Fire Officer and take on board any advice.

A senior staff member has been appointed as the fire safety officer and will carry out fire safety checks of fire safety equipment and fire exits. A number of staff members have completed training on fire safety, and the remaining staff members will complete the training in the coming days. The service has liaised with the Fire Officer in Carlow.

2. The stackable beds are stored in the storage room and the manager has introduced checks to ensure that the floor beds are stored safely and that all fire exits are clear.

Safe Sleep:

3. The registered provider provided a response to the Immediate Action Notice which stated the following measures were immediately implemented by the service;
 - a. The importance of correct sleep checks to be carried out by Educators discussed at meeting 14 April 2025
 - b. Sleep checks will be filled out in real time and monitored by the service
 - c. A thermometer was purchased on 14 April 2025 and put into the sleep room.
4. The registered provider stated that the staff member who is conducting sleep checks physically enters the room to observe children.
5. Bedding was checked thoroughly and removed if not appropriate. Regular check of bedding will take place and be replaced accordingly.
6. All footwear and unnecessary clothing will be removed for rest periods. A display has been put onto the notice board to remind staff to remove footwear and heavy clothing prior to sleep.

Infection Control:

7. A display has been put onto the notice board to outline safe materials for the use on floor beds.
8. Correct bedding will be used on floor beds to include a sheet and blanket for each individual child. Regular check of bedding will take place and be replaced accordingly.

9. The service will use the emersion in summer months and heating in winter months switched on at 7.30am to provide a supply of warm water for hand washing. There will be an endless supply of warm water for handing washing. Water checks were added to the daily checklist.
10. Paper towels are supplied in all bathrooms and care rooms and it has been added to the daily risk assessment to ensure there is ample supply.
11. Nappy changing practices were discussed and all staff members understand the importance of adhering to nappy changing policies. Staff were all retrained on nappy changing practice. Nappy changing policy displayed in the area along with visual display. The service's policy was also emailed to all staff for attention. The manager will carry out regular observation of nappy changes to ensure all steps are followed.
12. Manager will prioritise implementation of any Regulatory notices received from Tusla, Pobal, CCC etc.
13. The bin was replaced immediately.
14. One person has been assigned for cooking solely. An additional staff member was recruited to carry out cooking duties within the service.
15. There is a new foot operated bin in place.

General Safety:

16. The service has re-vetted all staff and all re-vetting will be carried out in the specified timeframe going forward.
17. The wooden table was removed from the outdoor area. Broken equipment will be reported to management and will be replaced immediately. This was added to the daily risk assessment for the outdoor area.
18. The radiator cover was secured and poses no risk to children. All radiators were checked.

Supporting documentation submitted

Fire Safety:

Photograph of the fire assembly point and unobstructed fire exit route at the side of the premises. Record of a fire drill carried out on 16 April 2025. Staff meeting agenda dated 14 April 2025 with fire safety listed. Records detailing that staff members read the service fire safety policy on 16 April 2025. Certificates for fire safety training for three staff members and evidence of engagement with the Fire Officer.

Safe Sleep:

Photograph of a thermometer in the sleep room. Staff meeting agenda dated 14 April 2025 with safe sleep listed. Records to demonstrate that staff engaged with the service's safe sleep policy.

Infection Control:

Photograph of floor beds and displays with information for staff members regarding procedures to follow. Copy of a daily risk assessment template which included prompts to check for paper towels, warm water, disposable aprons and gloves. Photograph of lidded bin, paper towel dispenser, floor beds with sheets and cellular blankets.

General Safety:

A daily risk assessment for the outdoor area which included the checking of equipment to ensure that it is in good repair. Renewed Garda Vetting for two staff members.

Summary Comment

Actions and supporting documentation were submitted regarding the findings relating to fire safety, general safety, safe sleep and infection control. Based on the implementation of these actions, the inspectorate is assured that reasonable measures have been taken by the registered provider.

Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child will be assessed on the 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.

(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) A person trained in first aid including first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service as evidenced through discussion with the staff and the in-date FAR certification provided for inspection.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes were suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions on the premises, out of the reach of children.

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)(b)

Documentation was available which demonstrated that a fire drill was completed on 05 April 2025 with the Pre-school and Montessori rooms. A record was available to demonstrate that a maintenance check was carried out on the firefighting equipment and smoke detection systems in the service in March 2025.

(4) Written procedures were displayed within the service which outlined the route to be followed in the event of a fire.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

- A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.

Non-Compliance Information

- (e)
1. The nappy changing area was not suitable as it posed a risk of injury to the children and staff members. The nappy changing unit was in the staff sanitary area and located within a shower unit. The following was observed on the day of inspection;
 - a. A shower hose and water dial were within reach when a child was lying on the nappy changing mat.
 - b. Staff were observed to lift the children onto the nappy changing mat and manoeuvre the children between a tile intersection of the shower and a shelving unit onto the nappy changing unit.

- c. Staff were observed to stand on the raised frame of the shower tray when carrying out nappy changes.
 - d. Nappy changing for some children was observed to take place on the floor of the sanitary area due to the absence of steps for children to access the nappy changing area.
2. Based on the age and stage of development of the children within the service, the nappy changing facilities available did not support the needs of all children requiring a nappy change. Staff members were observed to carry out nappy changes for their group of children at set times during the day, and as required. At 12pm, a staff member identified a child aged 1 to 2 years required a nappy change. When the staff member went to the nappy changing area, the area was occupied with a staff member and child from another room. The staff member returned with the child to the nappy changing area on three occasions, however the nappy changing area remained occupied. This child remained unsettled until their nappy was changed at 12.25pm. There were inadequate facilities available to support the age and stage of the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The changing area has been renovated.
2. A change in circumstance form was submitted to the Inspectorate on the 11 July 2025 outlining that the baby room ceased operation. This now reduces the pressure on the nappy changing area.

Supporting documentation submitted

Receipt for changing table and mat [09/05/2025], evidence of proposed works to be carried out on nappy changing area [16/04/2025], Photograph of the renovated nappy changing area

Summary Comment

The regulatory requirement has been met for Regulation 29 Premises.