

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW025
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Name of Service:	Little Stars Childcare
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Address of Service:	Quinagh Green, Blackbog Road, Carlow, Co. Carlow
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Eircode:	R93 TF96
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Name of Registered Provider:	Susan McLoughlin
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	05/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	23	PM	24
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Child and Family Agency, Athy Rd, Carlow.
Inspection undertaken by:	E Cullen
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

Little Stars Childcare is a private full day childcare service, located on the outskirts of Carlow town. The service is registered to care for children from birth to six years, however, currently takes enrolments from twelve months of age. It opens Monday to Friday, from 08:00 to 18:00 hours,

The service operates from a detached, dormer bungalow situated at the entrance to the housing estate and is comprised of four early years classrooms, two on the ground floor and two on the first floor, a designated sleep room, kitchen and dining area and an onsite outdoor play area. A registered school aged service is also provided onsite.

Staffing

There were seven staff members employed in the service, including the registered provider. All seven staff members held at least a minimum qualification at level 5 in early childhood care and education on the national qualification 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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The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9 – Management and Recruitment, 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service, 11 – Staffing levels, 15 – Record of a pre-school child, 19 - Health, welfare and development of child, 25 - First Aid, 26 – Fire safety measures, and 28 – Insurance. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15. As a result, the scope of the inspection included both the outdoor and indoor areas.

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, 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)(b) There was a designated person in charge on the day of inspection, and a named person was available to deputise as required. An organisational chart provided details of the management and reporting structures within the service.

(2) Documentation was reviewed for the 6 staff members employed by the service and the registered provider.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available for each staff member from either a past employer, or from a source other than a past employer.

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

(d) Police vetting was available for two staff members who had lived outside the state for a period over 6 months.

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(4) Certificates of qualification were available on file demonstrating that staff members held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

(3) The registered provider did not take appropriate measures to ensure that all employees were suitable to work in an early years service prior to their commencement. International police vetting for two staff members was not requested from staff members.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

All copies were shown to the inspector on the day. Going forward we will ensure all international police vetting is up to date and in staff members files.

Supporting documentation submitted

None required.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions submitted. The noncompliance identified has been adequately addressed.

Part III – Management and Staff

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

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

Compliance Information

There were written policies, procedures and statements, as specified in Schedule 5, available for the service. The policies reviewed for this inspection were the following: statement of purpose and function, policy on healthy eating, policy on managing behaviour, policy on infection control and policy on inclusion in the service. These policies and procedures were appropriate and specific to the setting.

Non-Compliance Information

The service policy on safe sleep did not adequately reflect the practices of sleep for children over the age of two years old in the service. There was no reference to children sleeping on floor beds or how supervision of sleeping children is managed. Additionally, the policy did not set out the procedure for managing a sleep related emergency.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

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It is written in our policy that children will have access to sleep mats or floor beds, also states in our policy that we use an electric monitors and visual sleep checks are recorded in a sleep log every 10 minutes this also records the child's name, dob, date, time, child's position, colour, breathing, room temperature and who checked.

Although we do have a procedure for managing sleep related emergencies in our policy we have updated it to a more in-depth version which all staff are aware of and have read. All staff are aware of our updated policy and what to do in the case of an emergency. Children sleeping on floor mats will always be supervised.

Supporting documentation submitted

Safe sleep policy

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified has been adequately addressed.

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

(1) On the day of inspection there were adequate numbers of staff were working directly with the children at all times. There were 23 children with 4 staff members directly supervising them during the morning of the inspection and 24 children with 5 staff members during the afternoon of inspection. The person in charge was acting a floating staff member to cover breaks.

(2) On the morning of the inspection, the staff to child ratios were maintained as follows throughout the service:

- In the toddler room, there were 5 children aged 1 to 2 years old being cared for by 1 staff.
- In the junior preschool room, there were 6 children aged 2 to 3 years old being cared for by 1 staff.
- In the senior playschool room, there were 6 children aged 3 to 4 years old being cared for by 1 staff.
- The Montessori room, there were 6 children aged 4 to 5 years old being cared for by 1 staff.

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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

(1)(a) – (i) Prior to a child commencing in the service, all parents and guardians were issued with a child registration form. This registration form was developed by the service and contained all of the required information for parents and guardians to complete. A sample of ten child registration forms were reviewed on the day of inspection, and all were completed in full with appropriate declarations signed by parents and guardians.

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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, and

Compliance Information

Staff members were observed to engage with children respectfully and in a positive manner. The small group sizes supported the development of staff and child relationships in the service. Staff demonstrated a keen familiarity with the children in their groups. In the junior preschool room morning play lead into tidy up time, the staff member ensured a smooth transition at the children's pace. They were guided using a clean-up song and direct encouragement to tidy up the classroom in developmentally appropriate way. The staff member used her knowledge of the children to prompt playful tasks within the clean-up activity.

Staff members were observed to sit with children in small groups or individually, engage in conversation with and listened attentively to the children as they spoke. An example of this was seen when a ladybird was seen in the outdoor play area. A staff member fostered the children's sense of curiosity by asking questions like 'would you like to hold it?' and 'how many spots can you count?'. Discussion among the group of children about the ladybird ensued and children were observed to take turns to hold it if they wanted to. In the toddler room a small group story time supported language development and turn taking, promoting actions like clapping hands and movements such as pointing.

The service is implementing an inclusion policy and this was evident in their practices during the inspection. The environment was inclusive and representative of the children attending the service, with images of the children and their families displayed. Adjustments to the learning environment and teaching strategies were used to support the learning and development of all children attending the service. The service's inclusion coordinator detailed how support plans were in place where required and how the service works alongside families to support a positive educational environment.

The indoor areas were bright, warm, and homely, this was achieved using natural materials and neutral colours. Children's identity and belonging was fostered through the display of works of art and their recent learning. Low-level open shelving units were used to create areas of interest. Children could freely access materials and

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resources from the labelled shelves, promoting independence and choice making. A range of play-based materials were offered in the home corners, small world play, construction, and puzzles areas of each room. Children's literacy development was promoted with a well laid out library areas. Books, dress up materials and puppets were available for use by the children.

Outdoors, children were observed to engage in a range of activities on the recently renovated all-weather surface. Wheeled toys and balance bicycles were available for use. A large mud kitchen equipped with numerous play props provided opportunity to engage in role play and messy play. A planting area had also been expanded to allow children to further engagement with planting and plant care. Large timber play resources such as a pirate ship, gazebo and cabin provided opportunity for role play and active movement.

Non-Compliance Information

The table used by children in the toddler room was too high for the children using it. The table was at the chest height of the children, who were observed reaching up from chairs during mealtimes to eat.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

New table has been purchased. We will ensure the correct size table for the aged and stage of the children is in place.

Supporting documentation submitted

Receipt.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The noncompliance identified has been adequately addressed.

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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 three staff members trained in first aid response available to the children attending the early years service.

(2)(a)(b) There was a suitably equipped first aid box stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises available for the use of the children attending the early years 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 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) There was a record of fire drills which had taken place in the service. The most recent fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 07 April 2026.

(b) There was a record available demonstrating that the firefighting equipment was last serviced in October 2025 and the smoke alarm system was last serviced on 10 November 2025.

(4) There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed beside each emergency exit door on the premises.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service demonstrated insurance cover for a full day care for 35 children. The insurance policy commenced 28 March 2026 and will expire 27 March 2027.