

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015CW025		
Name of Service:	Little Stars Childcare		
Address of Service:	Quinagh Green, Blackbog Road, Carlow.		
Eircode:	R93 TF96		
Name of Registered Provider:	Susan Mcloughlin		
Service type:	Full Day		
Date of Inspection:	19/07/2023		
No of pre-school children:	AM	20	PM 18
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Childrens Services Regulation, 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).			
Conditions if applicable	Not applicable		

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 and operates from 07:30 to 18:15 hours, Monday to Friday. 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.

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 qualifications 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. The inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under the following regulations:

- 9(1)(2)(3)(4)-Management and Recruitment,
- 11(1)(2)-Staffing Levels,
- 16(1)-Record in relation to Pre-School Service,
- 19(1)(a)-Health, Welfare and Development of Child,
- 20(1)(a)(b)-Facilities for Rest and Play,
- 22-Food and Drink,
- 23-Safeguarding Health, Safety, and Welfare of child,
- 25-First Aid,
- 26- Fire Safety Measures,
- 28-Insurance.

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.

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.

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
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(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) There was a designated person in charge on the day of inspection.

(b) The designated person in charge confirmed that there was also a named person available to deputise as required. Both were present for the duration of the inspection. The registered provider was also onsite for the duration of the inspection.

(c) A clear outline of the management of the structure was displayed on a poster in the main hall of the service, identifying the lines of authority, accountability, the roles and responsibilities of individual staff members in the service.

(2) Staff files for seven staff members employed in the service were reviewed by the inspector.

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

(c) Garda vetting certificates were available on file, for each staff member.

(d) Not applicable, as no staff member had lived outside of the state for a period longer than six months.

(3) The registered provider demonstrated how the procedures specified in paragraph (2) were carried out prior to persons commencing employment in the service, in line with the service's recruitment policy.

Employment records and validation of reference forms demonstrated that these procedures were carried out prior to any person commencing employment in the service.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available in each staff member's file, demonstrating that each staff member held a qualification at the minimum level 5 and above on the national framework of qualifications.

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) The inspector observed that there were adequate numbers of staff working directly with the early years children.
- (2) There were three rooms in operation on the day of inspection and the ratio of adults to children were as follows.

Toddler Room

In the toddler room, located on the ground floor there were 5 early years children, aged 1 to 2 years, cared for by 1 staff member.

Junior Playschool Room

In the junior playschool room, also located on the ground floor, there were 6 early years children, aged 1.5 to 3 years, cared for by 2 staff members.

Montessori & Pre-School Rooms

The two senior classrooms, the Montessori and pre-school rooms, located on the first floor had joined together for free play in the outdoor area. There were nine children being cared for by two staff members.

The registered provider and designated person in charge were supernumerary and were observed providing support for each group of children and relief for staff breaks.

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:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*
- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (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.*

Compliance Information

(1)(a)-(k) The registered provider developed, maintained and appropriately stored the following relevant documents and records required in the service: (a) staff records, (b) the type of service and the age profile of the children, that the service is registered to provide, (c) details of the adult:child ratios in each classroom within the service, (d) the programme of care provided in the service, (e) the facilities available, (f) the opening hours and fees of the service, (g) the policies, procedures and statements that the service is required under Regulation 10, (h) each child's daily attendance details, (i) staff rosters, (j) administration of medication records and (k) accident and incident records, involving ant early years children attending the service.

A sample of the records reviewed by the inspector were observed to be completed in full, with the relevant details recorded.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

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

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) Basic Care Needs of Infants and Children.

On arrival to the service, the inspector observed that all the children and staff had moved to the outdoor play area, as the weather was dry and warm. Children were observed to be wearing their summer hats and informed the inspector that they had suncreams applied by their keyworkers prior to going to the outdoor area. In discussion with staff, this was in line with the service's application of suncream policy, to ensure that all children were wearing suncream, and that it was reapplied in a timely manner.

Children were observed engaged in a variety of activities in the outdoor area, with staff participating in activities and supporting them when required. Children were observed making mud pies in the outdoor kitchen, challenging themselves physically on the balance beam, dancing in bubbles from a bubble machine, engaged in imaginary play in the large wooden ship, while some chose to sit quietly in the sheltered pagoda reading or drawing with the supplies of art and craft materials that were provided.

Staff were observed to promptly respond to cues from children, such as when they wished to go inside to use the toilet. Staff accompanied the children, remaining close by, affording them independence and privacy, but being present, should they require assistance or prompting with handwashing, post toileting.

All the children washed their hands prior to snack time, which they had decided to enjoy outdoors.

Children decided where they wanted their picnic benches moved to for snack time, which was supported by the staff. Children and staff worked together arranging the benches and preparing plates, cutlery and drinking glasses. Staff had moved highchairs outdoors, for the few younger children who were not yet ready to sit independently. An outdoor drinking station was provided where children could access water whenever they were thirsty, this was replenished regularly by a staff member.

At lunch time, the children had hoped to enjoy their lunch outside also. After preparing the area, a shower of rain arrived, with staff and children deciding to move quickly to the adjacent indoor dining area.

This untimely transition took place seamlessly, with staff and children working together, arranging themselves at the indoor dining tables.

After lunch, several of the younger children demonstrated cues of tiredness, which were responded to promptly by staff. Children had their nappies changed in line with the service's nappy changing policy, hands and faces were washed and the children were placed in their assigned cots in the service's sleep room, for their afternoon nap.

The children were observed to be confident and self-assured while settling to sleep, familiar with their surroundings. Staff members were observed to physically check the children at 10 minute intervals, ensuring that each child's colour, breathing, and position was recorded.

Supporting Relationships around children.

Staff were observed communicating effectively with each other, ensuring supervision of children was maintained throughout transitions in the service and while meeting children's care needs. Children were observed to make decisions independently, for example, deciding to stay outdoors and eat outdoors. The inspector also observed that individual children's choices were supported, one child wished to draw and colour indoors and a variety of colouring and paper craft materials were provided at a table in the adjacent dining area within staff's view. The staff were observed and heard communicating clearly to the children before carrying out care tasks. For example, a staff member asked a child if they would like their nappy changed and waited until the child took their hand and headed in the direction of the nappy changing room. Another child was observed hovering around their key worker, where upon the staff member, bending to child level, asked if they wanted a cuddle, which the child responded to by holding out their arms for a cuddle.

At drop off and collection times, staff were observed sharing information with the children's parents, accepting any information regarding children, and informing parents of their individual child's progress throughout their time in the service.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

Compliance Information

(1)(a) There were four classrooms available in the service. Each classroom was planned with developmentally appropriate furniture, equipment, play materials and resources for the age group assigned to the individual classroom. Three of the classrooms, the toddler room, junior playschool room and preschool room were in operation on the day of inspection. Due to low numbers of children in the Montessori room, the children joined with the children from the preschool room and spent most of the day playing in the outdoor area.

An onsite, grass covered, outdoor play area was equipped with child sized picnic benches, wooden shelters such as a schoolhouse, a ship, a pagoda house, which was used as an outdoor classroom, balance beams, sand and water play.

(b) The sleep room, which had six cots, was available for children under two years of age to sleep in during the day. Six mattresses were available for children over two years of age to sleep on in a quiet designated space in the toddler room, if they wished to do so at any time during their time at the service.

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 service had a healthy eating policy which was shared with the children’s parents and guardians on registration of their child at the service. Parents provided the children’s morning snacks which were stored in the refrigerator. The registered provider provided the main meals in the service with the daily menu displayed for parents and children to see. A three week menu plan was in place in the service. On the day of inspection, the main meal served to the children was chicken casserole and mash. Water stations were provided in each of the classrooms and in the outdoor area. Alternative food options were available for children when required if a child disliked the menu option.

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 main entrance door was secured with an internal thumb lock system to prevent unauthorised access to the service.

This door led into the main office area from where the designated person in charge could view any visitors through a clear window. Children were only allowed in this area at drop-off and collection times and therefore could not exit the service unsupervised.

The external perimeter of the service was secured by a concrete wall and child height wooden fencing.

All emergency exits and fire doors were observed to be kept clear and accessible in the event of an emergency.

Windows in the classrooms on the ground floor were inaccessible to the children and were secured when open with appropriate restrictive devices, as were the windows on the first floor.

The staircase leading to the first floor was well lit with natural lighting, an anti-slip surface and a handrail for the children's safety.

The outdoor play area was secured with wooden fencing to prevent any unauthorised access or any child from exiting unsupervised.

The staff demonstrated from records that a daily outdoor play area risk assessment was carried out on the area and equipment available.

The kitchen area was inaccessible to the children, secured by a counter between the kitchen and dining area for the purpose of serving food. The main entrance to the kitchen could only be accessed by staff from the corridor.

All cleaning equipment and materials were safely secured in a designated storage area away from children.

Infection Control:

Children and staff were observed to wash their hands at appropriate times in line with the service's infection control policy. Children used the wash hand basins in their toilets after messy play, outdoor play, after blowing their noses and before mealtimes. Each child's hand wash basin had a supply of liquid hand soap and disposable paper towels.

Staff were observed carrying out hand washing procedures before and after nappy changes or assisting children with toileting, while also observing that the children were assisted or prompted to wash their hands.

Cleaning schedules were maintained within the service as evidenced by records maintained in each room.

Tables outside and in the dining area were disinfected and wiped clean with paper towels prior to meals.

Administration of Medication:

On the day of inspection, there was no child in the service that required prescribed or emergency medication. On review of past administration of medication records maintained by the service, records were completed appropriately in line with the service's administration of medication policy.

Safe Sleep:

Staff demonstrated that they were familiar with best practices in safe sleep, ensuring that children were suitably positioned when going into the cots to sleep. Physical checks were carried out on each sleeping child at ten-minute intervals, with the child's colour, breathing and position documented. Staff continually monitored the temperature of the sleep room to ensure that it remained between 16 °C- 20°C.

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

(2)(a) A first aid box was available on a shelf in the kitchen.

(b) The first aid box was easily accessed by staff, if required by a child attending the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) While it is acknowledged that there was one staff member trained as a first aid responder (FAR), the registered provider could not sufficiently demonstrate that there was always at least one staff member with FAR training onsite, while the service was in operation. The staff roster did not demonstrate if another staff member with FAR training was available, to cover for leave or meal breaks in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider submitted a response stating that two further staff members completed FAR training.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of certificates of accreditation provided.

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliances. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on the next inspection.

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 written record of the monthly fire drills that took place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on the 08 June 2023.
- (b) The registered provider maintained a record of the number, type and maintenance of fire-fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the service. The last maintenance check of fire-fighting equipment was recorded as having taken place in September 2022 and the last annual service of smoke alarms was recorded as having taken place on 30 June 2023.
- (4) The registered provider ensured that fire procedure notices were in each classroom and on the main corridor.
- The fire assembly point was clearly identified in the outdoor area.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was a current insurance certificate for the service displayed on a notice board in the main hall. The insurance certificate detailed insurance cover for a full day care service provision for 35 early years children.