

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL067
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Name of Service:	Little Dreamers
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Address of Service:	Carnamuggagh Upper, Mountain Top, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F92 KR44
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary McColgan
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	24/06/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	40	PM	30
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
Inspection undertaken by:	L Mc Glynn
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

Little Dreamers is a privately owned and operated full day care service located on the outskirts of the large urban town of Letterkenny. The service is registered to operate from 7.45am to 6.00pm each weekday and provides full day, part time and sessional preschool care to children aged 0-6 years. The premises is located in a quiet residential area and operates from a detached single-story building purposely adapted for the provision of an early years' service. There are three care rooms, a sleep room, kitchen, office and sanitary accommodation for both staff and children. There are two outdoor play areas one for the infant and toddler children and one for older children.

Staffing

There were 15 staff members working in the service at the time of inspection which included the registered provider. There were 10 staff present on the day of inspection which included the registered provider, eight staff members working directly with the children and one staff member in the kitchen.

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 inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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, 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.

(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 of operating the service and a named staff member appointed to deputise in their absence.

(b) The designated person in charge was present at all times during the inspection. The registered provider confirmed that the designated person in charge or deputy was available at all times when the service was in operation.

(c) There was a structure in place that identified the lines of authority and the person in charge at all times.

(2) At the time of inspection, the registered provider confirmed that there were 15 staff members who worked in the service. With reference to the above listed elements of Regulation 9, recruitment records in respect of the 15 staff members were reviewed and the following information was available:

(a) (b) Two references from past employers, in particular the most recent past employer was on file for 12 staff members and one reference was on file for one staff member.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 15 adults. However, 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. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) International police vetting from the relevant state was available for four staff members.

(4) Documentary evidence was presented to demonstrate that the 14 staff members who required it had obtained 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.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) (b) There was no references on file for one staff member and no second reference on file for a second staff member.

(d) International police vetting from the relevant state was not available for one staff member.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) (a) All copies of references have now been obtained. Going forward, management will ensure that all references will be relevant and available for inspection.

(d) International vetting for one of the member of staff has now been obtained and translated. Management will ensure that all staff that need international vetting is applied for immediately.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of references and international police vetting was submitted.

Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliances identified on 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

(1) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(2) The minimum adult/child ratio was maintained throughout the inspection. On the inspector's arrival at the service, 40 children were being cared for by 8 staff members in three care rooms.

- In the baby/toddler room four staff members were caring for 14 children aged 1-3 years.
- In the Jr ECCE room two staff members were caring for nine children aged 3-4 years.
- In the Sr ECCE room two staff members were caring for 17 children aged 4-5 years.

In the afternoon, 30 children were cared for by 8 staff members.

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.*

(3) (c) an authorised person.

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service.

Compliance Information

(1) (a) to (i) A sample record of 12 children attending the service were reviewed. The required information including the authorisation to collect the child, details of illness or special needs of the child and emergency contact were fully completed for each child.

(3) (c) The records were available in writing for inspection.

(4) The registered provider confirmed that the records were retained for the required period as set out in the regulations.

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

(1) (a) On the day of inspection, children enjoyed a variety of nutritious food served at regular intervals which included a main meal of minced stew, potatoes and vegetables. Snacks of sandwiches were served in the afternoon with a selection of fruit. A choice of milk and water was served with each meal. Staff were on hand to offer support and assistance to the children and appropriate seating was provided by way of highchairs, each one equipped with a five-point safety harness. Staff members sat with the children while they ate and were heard encouraging and praising children for trying new foods, promoting positive attitudes to nutrition.

Babies and toddlers were observed to have their nappy changed in a timely and sensitive manner. Older children who were toilet-trained were independent in their toileting needs with staff providing assistance when required. Children's sanitary accommodation was available adjacent to each of the pre-school rooms facilitating easy access. In the baby toddler room, staff members informed the inspector that the individual sleep needs of children were met in line with their home routine on enrolment and over time they transitioned into the routine of the service. A designed sleep room with standard cots was available and individual stackable beds were provided for older children for a scheduled period of rest in the middle of the day. Comfortable seating, mats and cushions were available and accessible to children in all care rooms to allow children the opportunity to rest and relax if they wished throughout the day.

Children were observed moving freely around each care room choosing their desired play activities. Each of the rooms were observed having access to their designated outdoor play areas for sustained periods of time during the day. The equipment and materials were laid out in a manner that provided unrestricted movement for children.

Staff members were observed interacting warmly with the children, responding appropriately to their verbal and non-verbal cues, and providing meaningful responses. Children were observed to seek out staff

members for assistance and comfort when upset. This was responded to in a caring and positive manner by staff members. Children were actively praised by staff members for their involvement in activities and on completion of tasks, particularly when they provided help to staff or other children. Staff demonstrated a sound awareness of how to appropriately manage children's behaviour and minor disagreements were dealt with promptly by staff.

There was evidence in each of the care rooms of staff members carrying out on-going observations of children in the service. Staff who spoke with the inspector explained that journals containing a portfolio of the children's activities and artwork was compiled for each child and shared with parents. Staff also documented weekly, monthly and yearly plans of activities in each room and staff spoke with the inspector about themes that were explored throughout the rooms including a 'forest theme' and a feeling each month. The activities included children bringing in items they found in their natural environment, creating artwork and in the Sr ECCE room, making a feelings tree.

The three care rooms in the service were assigned for use by different age groups of children. Each of the rooms contained clearly defined areas of interest. The baby toddler room was arranged into three play spaces. A fenced off alcove section was designated for use by young babies and contained a range of play equipment, materials and resources to support the learning and development needs of younger children. Items of interest included a wall mounted shatter proof mirror, a large soft mat for floor play, tummy time, rolling and crawling and a range of stable props and push along toys to support the learner walker. Play materials included baskets with a range of both plastic cause and effect toys and natural open-ended materials, sensory boards, soft toys and reading materials for children to explore.

The larger area of this room was used by older toddlers and was arranged in a manner that provided ample space for children move around and select play items. The area contained a wide range of play items that catered for children developing learning needs. A range of blocks, jigsaws, peg boards and shape sorters provided for children's cognitive development and fine motor skills. Interest areas such as home/kitchen area, construction materials, transport toys and small world figures provided spaces for children to engage in role and imaginary play individually or alongside their peers. A small room off this area was set out as a quiet space for children to rest, relax and engage their senses. The room contained

soft floor mats, a range of both soft and textured cushions and sensory squares. The room was dimly lit with colourful moving lights.

The Jr ECCE room was subdivided into three play areas. A small area at the bottom of the room was resourced with a range of reading materials and low-level comfortable seating for children. The larger area facilitated table top, art, sensory and messy play activities with a range of open shelving housing jigsaws, peg boards, transport toys, blocks and art materials. Children were observed in an activity making playdough on a large low-level tray. The third area in this room facilitated role and imaginary play and contained a kitchen/home area, large construction blocks, a farm area, doll and baby care items and a shop area. Each of the areas were well resourced with a supply of both plastic and real-world materials to support children's play. The Sr ECCE room was also laid out in a manner that provided defined a range of interest areas for children, each of the interest areas supported children's learning and development and there was evidence that staff had considered each area and the materials to add that would enhance children's play experiences. The room contained art, messy and sensory play materials, a large doll house with a range of doll and baby care items, a kitchen/home area, a shop area, construction bench, doctors' unit and open shelving units with a range of tabletop items and supporting resources. The items within each of the interest areas included a combination of both toy items and real-world resources, for example, a range of tools, natural wood and clothing was provided in the construction area.

There were two outdoor play areas on the premises for the younger and older preschool children. The baby toddler area contained a range of play items to support children's developing physical skills. The second larger area to the side of the building was designated for use by the older preschool children. There was space in this area for children to engage in active physical play such as running, ball play and cycling. The area also contained items that facilitated imaginary and sensory play such as a mud kitchen, sand and water play facilities, a wooden playhouse and a small patio area with wooden picnic style seating.. The area was secured with boundary fencing and was accessible to children throughout the day.

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:

- Cleaning products used in the service were securely stored so as to be inaccessible to the pre-school children.
- There was no evidence of hazards in the indoor or outdoor areas, toys and play equipment appeared in good repair and all electrical flexes and cables were in good condition and out of children's reach.
- Blind cords were secured in each area.
- The kitchen and storage areas were inaccessible to children and cleaning materials frequently used in the service were stored on high level shelf out of children's reach.

Infection Control:

- The pre-school rooms and adjoining sanitary facilities were in a clean and hygienic condition. Up to date cleaning schedules outlining appropriate cleaning methods and the various areas to be cleaned within the playrooms and sanitary accommodation were available. Staff members were observed cleaning play areas and frequently touched surfaces after children's use and prior to snack time.
- Liquid soap and paper towels were available in the playrooms and in the children's sanitary accommodation to support hand washing practices. Children were observed washing their hands at regular intervals including after using the toilet, and before snack.
- The care rooms and sanitary accommodation was adequately ventilated by way of openable windows or mechanical ventilation in cases where no window was available.

Administration of Medication:

- There was a policy in the service on the safe administration of medication and when asked, staff were conversant on the contents. Consent for the administration of emergency medication was on file for each child and individual records of the administration of prescription and anti-febrile medication were available for review. Medication was stored securely out of reach of children.

Safe Sleep:

- There was one sleep room containing eight standard cots located off the baby toddler room. The cots were clearly labelled and assigned to individual children with a supply of clean bed linen available for use.

- Physical checks at intervals no more than 10 minutes apart were carried out and documented by staff. A sample of the sleep records maintained in the baby toddler room was reviewed on inspection and these included details of the time of the check, the staff member who carried out the check, the sleep position of each child, any change in the child's normal skin colour, any change in the child's normal breathing pattern.

Fire Safety:

- There was documentary evidence to demonstrate the smoke alarm system was subject to routine maintenance and testing. Emergency exits were free from obstruction and a notice on the procedure for the safe evacuation in the event of a fire was on display at exit points throughout the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- Garda vetting was available for four staff members. However, these vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
- An entrance door to the service was found to be unsecured on one occasion during the inspection. It is acknowledged that a staff immediately secured the door when it was brought to their attention. On a separate occasion, the side gate was propped open by a parent during collection time. It is again acknowledged that, when this was noticed by staff it was immediately secured.
- The water temperature at two of the children's wash hand basins were found to be over the maximum safe limit of 43°C, one in the baby toddler nappy change area and a second in the Sr ECCE room.
- There was a large waste bin located in the outdoor play area.

Infection Control:

- Children's hands were not routinely washed in the baby room after nappy changing posing a risk of cross infection.
- There was no waterproof covering on the cot mattresses in the sleep room.

Safe Sleep:

- Staff did not maintain a record of room temperature as part of their routine sleep checks. Staff informed the inspector that they check the room temperature routinely and increase or reduce the temperature accordingly, however there is no written record of this occurring.
- Contrary to safe sleep guidance which states '*mattresses should not have any raised or cushioned areas*' a cushion had also been placed between the cot base and the mattress of two cots.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Two of the vetting's have come back but there are still two outstanding. Management will make sure all vetting is up to date at all times.
2. Management have sent correspondence to all parents regarding the importance of keeping the gate closed at all times. A member of staff will stand by the gate in the morning at that very busy period between 8:45 and nine. A new door releaser has been fitted to ensure the gate closes after exit and a new magnet also. New signage has been ordered. Ensure exits are secure at all times and regular checks to make sure in good working order.
3. Contacted plumbers, they have put a thermostat on the two taps. Taps will be regularly checked.
4. That bin was recycling bin and had been taken from behind the gate to be removed outside that afternoon. In future leave outside gate until being put out the front for collection. Management spoke to the staff about only removing from outside the gate at the back when going to place outside the front.

Infection Control:

5. Management had a meeting with the staff in this area and stressed the importance of always washing hands when they in the nappy changing room. Staff will ensure hands are washed at all times.
6. All cots now have waterproof covers and extra ones have been bought.

Safe Sleep:

7. Management devised a new sleep room temperature checklist, which will be checked four times daily. A standalone thermometer was purchased for the room. The sleep room temperature checklist will be visible in the sleep room and monitored at all times.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documents and images were submitted to evidence compliance.

Summary Comment

The information and documentation submitted by the registered provider has been reviewed and deemed to address 7 of the 8 the non-compliances identified on inspection. The non-compliance documented at point 1. Remains outstanding until appropriate vetting has been received.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

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

(iii) an employee, or

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

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

Compliance Information

(1) Staff members were found to check the children in and out of the service each day. Accurate attendance times for the children were recorded in handwritten record books by the staff members on the day of inspection.

(3) (a) (b) A daily written record was kept of visitors to the service which the inspector was requested to complete during the inspection.