

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL072
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Name of Service:	Little Smarties CLG
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Address of Service:	Station Street, Pettigo, Pettigo, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F94 TRC9
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Name of Registered Provider:	Claire Colton
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	11/02/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Donegal Early Years Inspectorate, St. Conal's Campus, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal. F95 XK94
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Inspection undertaken by:	L McGlynn
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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 Smarties CLG is a non-profit pre-school service located in the border village of Pettigo in County Donegal. The service is registered to provide a sessional pre-school service, Monday to Friday for children aged 2 to 6 years. The service is also registered to provide school age care.

The premises consists of two bright and spacious care rooms. One of the rooms is used for preschool children and the second is exclusively used for school age children. There is a small 'quiet room' adjacent to the preschool room used to provide more focused activities for smaller groups of children or one to one care. There is also a kitchen area, a staffroom, sanitary accommodation and an office. Children have access to an outdoor area on the premises; this outdoor play-area can be accessed directly from each of the care rooms.

Staffing

There were eight staff members employed to work in the service, two of the staff members worked exclusively with school age children, one staff member was employed in a relief capacity and the remaining five staff worked with the preschool children including the service manager who was off on a period of leave at the time of inspection. The registered provider does not work in the service on a daily basis, there is a named person in charge.

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/safety/ premises and facilities. 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 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

(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

(2) The vetting files for all eight staff members were reviewed on this inspection and the following was deemed to meet the requirements of the regulation.

(a) (b) There were two references on file from a past employer, or a source other than a past employer for seven staff members.

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

(4) Documentary evidence was provided to demonstrate that the six staff members had obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2) (a) (b) 1. There was no second reference on file for one staff member.

2. Five of the references on file for three staff members were not validated.

(d) There was no record of experience on file for one staff member, therefore the requirement for international police vetting could not be determined.

(4) It could not be determined from the information presented on inspection that one staff member had obtained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or equivalent.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2) (a) (b) 1. The second reference has now been put on file in her folder.

2. All references have now been verified by our Board of Directors.

References will now be sent to us prior to any staff member starting and they will be printed off promptly.

(d) The C.V has now been placed in her folder, police vetting has been filed.

Folders will be checked more often and if any new staff begins the Board will verify their references the same day.

References will now be sent to us prior to any staff member starting and they will be printed off promptly.

(4) The staff members college tutor forwarded on her current stage in college to date which has been forwarded to DCEDIY. We are awaiting to hear back from them.

Supporting documentation submitted

No documentation submitted to evidence compliance.

Summary Comment

This regulation remains non-compliant as the registered provider's response did not contain any evidence to demonstrate compliance.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

- (1) Subject to this Regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that there is at all times an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.*
- (3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 of Schedule 6 opposite a particular reference number specified in column (1) of that Part in respect of the age range of the children specified in column (2) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.*

Compliance Information

- (1) There was an adequate number of adults employed to work directly with the children.
- (3) On the day of inspection, there were four adults caring for 18 children attending the sessional service. All children were aged 2-5 years.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

There was an adequate quantity and variety of play equipment for the number of children attending the service. All play items and equipment were observed to be well maintained, durable and suitable for the age and stage of development of the children attending. The preschool room contained adequate child sized tables and chairs for tabletop play and eating. Play items such as small animals, books, wheeled toys, construction blocks, puzzles and open-ended play materials were arranged in a manner that was easily accessed by the children in the preschool. The room had distinct areas of interest including a home corner, an art/painting area, doll and baby care area, a doctor/shop area, a tuff tray with playdough and a large tent with soft cushions individually labelled for children to use for resting and reading.

The outdoor area, directly accessible from the care room was equipment with a range of play items suitable to the age of the children. A sheltered area which could be used for playing in all weathers contained a sand pit, digging area, mud kitchen and painting easels. A larger area contained a climb and slide unit, musical instruments and ample space for children to engage in gross motor physical play.

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 had a lock and buzzer system preventing unauthorised access or the unsupervised exit of a child.
- The outdoor play area was secured with surround fencing and a single exit which was secured.
- The equipment and furniture in the preschool room was observed to be maintained in a good state of repair. Equipment in the outdoor area was safe for use by the age group of children attending.
- Hazardous items and cleaning materials were stored securely and were inaccessible to children.
- There were no electrical hazards observed.

Infection Control:

- Liquid soap, thermostatically controlled warm water and paper towels were available in the children's sanitary accommodation to allow for handwashing. Children were observed washing their hands throughout the day, before eating and after using the toilet.
- Foot pedal operated bins were available throughout the service and the main waste storage bins were in a secure area away from the children's play areas.
- Children's lunches were refrigerated prior to eating.
- Cleaning records were maintained and noted to be up to date. The care room, sanitary accommodation and communal areas were maintained in a clean, hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- No medicine had been administered to date with the current children attending. However, the person in charge evidenced the record available should medication be required. The record contained all required information.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency evacuation route from the pre-school room was easily identifiable by emergency exit signage. All designated emergency exits were observed to be clear and unobstructed.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

- (a) On superficial visual inspection, the building appeared of sound and stable structure with no visible defects. The building was purpose built for use as a preschool service in 2014 and was observed to be well maintained.
- (b) The main entrance door was secured with a lock and buzzer mechanism. The exit doors in the building and exit gate from the outdoor play area were secured in a manner which prevented children from exiting unsupervised or unauthorised adults from entering.
- (c) Adequate lighting was provided. Natural lighting consisted of three glass windows, a glass panelled exit door and glass panel in the entrance door in the playroom. Artificial lights consisted of fluorescent ceiling lights. All lights were encased in protective covers. An adequate source of heating was provided in the playroom and sanitary accommodation, and the air temperature was within the recommended 18 -22°C range. Both mechanical and natural ventilation was provided via openable windows and a mechanical ventilation system.
- (d) The premises presented as clean and subject to routine maintenance work as required.
- (e) The sanitary facilities in the service were adequately equipped with wash hand basins and toilets for the number of adults and children in attendance. There were three toilets, five wash hand basins available for children's use. One of the toilet cubicles also contained a nappy change bench.