

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DL075
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Name of Service:	Little Tobys Playschool
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Address of Service:	Glenkeady House, Ardmore, Muff, Co. Donegal
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Eircode:	F93 XE14
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Name of Registered Provider:	Cathy Mccarron
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	30/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	20
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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:	N McEndoo, S Killeen
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

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 Toby's Playschool is a privately owned and operated preschool service located outside the rural village of Muff on the Inishowen peninsula in Co. Donegal. The service is currently registered for the provision of a full day care service catering for preschool children aged 0 to 6 years and operates weekdays from 7:45am to 17:45 hours. The service is also registered to provide school age care. The premises consists of a detached two-story building with the pre-school occupying the entire ground floor area and private accommodation on the first floor. There are four playrooms, a sleep room and a kitchen area for preparing children's meals and snacks. The spacious outdoor area to the front of the building has been subdivided into different sections for children's outdoor play.

Staffing

The service employs 14 adults including the registered provider, who was present on the day of the inspection. Twelve adults were present on the day of the inspection. Seven adults worked directly with the preschool children in the care rooms. The other adults included the register provider, person in charge, a cook and two adults who provide maintenance support for the premises.

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 adults

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 regulations 9, 11, 16 K, 19, and 23. 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

1. A written immediate action notice under Regulation 23 – Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child was issued to the registered provider on 29 May 2025.
2. A written response was submitted by the registered provider on 03rd June 2025 outlining the measures taken to address the immediate concern.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, person in charge, adults and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Adults

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,
- (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)

The registered provider ensured that.

- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
- (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
- (c) There was 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.

(2)

On the day of inspection, the person in charge confirmed that there were 14 named adults who worked in the service. One of these adults had commenced working in the service since the previous inspection. A review of records demonstrated that the vetting documentation for 13 adults had been reviewed during a previous

inspection and were found to be compliant. Recruitment records in respect of the one newly recruited adult was reviewed and the following information was available:

(a) Two written validated references from past employers for one of the adults.

(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)

The adult file reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to meet the regulatory requirement.

Part III – Management and Adults

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.

(8) Without prejudice to paragraphs (2) to (7)-

(a) a registered provider of a pre-school service other than a child-minding service or a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that there are at least 2 adults on the premises at all times,

Compliance Information

(1)

On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.

(2)

The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.

(8)

The registered provider ensured that there were always at least two adults on the premises when children were

present in the service as evidenced in a sample review of the staff roster.

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:

- (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;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that records were kept in writing in respect of each preschool child attending the service in relation to.

- (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.
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

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:

- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

A sample of accident and incidents records involving a pre-school child were reviewed for this regulation, nine in total.

- (1) (k) Of the nine records reviewed, four contained all necessary information.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) (k) Of the nine files reviewed, the registered provider did not ensure that the signature of the manager was present on five of the forms.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The Service has implemented new Accident/Incident forms which have a space for management signature as the forms that were in use at the time of the inspection did not allow space for this. Part of an 'End of Day' checklist to ensure all Accident/Incident forms filled out on a given day signed by Designated Person in Charge or Deputised Person and another Staff Member as a safeguard against this reoccurring.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A revised accident and incident form has been submitted, now including a section for managerial signoff
- A copy of the End of Day Checklist has been submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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
- (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

- The service promoted healthy eating and food, as per the healthy eating policy. There was a weekly menu plan. Snacks and meals were provided on site at regular intervals throughout the day. On the day of inspection children were observed to eat fish fingers, potato chips and beans for their main meal of the day. Alternative options were available should a child have a dietary requirement or not like the food served on the day.

Younger children had the opportunity to feed themselves, appropriate to the age and stage of their development. Adults were on hand to support and encourage when required.

- Nappy changing was carried out regularly and promptly. Adults were observed to communicate and seek support swiftly from each other when unscheduled nappy changes were required. Nappy changing was handled in a positive and sensitive manner; adults were observed speaking to children during this time, labelling and reassuring children as they went. Changing was used as an opportunity for one-to-one interaction with lots of chat and conversations being had. Older children were observed using the toilet independently with adults in the room available to support if required. Appropriate hand washing practice was encouraged throughout the session before meals and after outdoor play.
- The sleep needs of younger children were met. Children were observed on the day sleeping at various intervals according to their needs. Older children were facilitated with a scheduled nap period. For children who did not require a sleep, or who woke early, a quiet rest corner was available, or they had the option to continue their play within the care room.
- The care rooms had a range of play-based materials that offered stimulation, exploration, and imagination. These were positioned at an accessible level to the children on open shelving fostering independence and facilitating choice, whilst encouraging curiosity, spontaneous play, and movement. Opportunity for sensorial activity was available on the day of inspection. In one of care rooms, the younger children, with support from the adult had created some artwork using tinfoil and paints.
- On the day of the inspection, children were observed joyfully practicing their graduation song, "I Am Special." The activity fostered a sense of pride and belonging, while also supporting their emotional development and self-expression.
- Children were seated comfortably with adults in the rest area and reading. The adults encouraged the children to participate by asking open-ended questions and inviting them to comment on the story. The children were actively involved and appeared to really enjoy shouting out colours and different shapes.
- The day of the inspection was warm and sunny. The adults present demonstrated care and attention to the children and were observed encouraging the children to apply sun cream. Help was given as required and the adults ensured that the children wore sun hats whilst outside.
- Minor disputes were dealt with efficiently on the day of inspection, two children became frustrated while taking turns during play. The adult was observed responding calmly, kneeling to the children's eye level and gently explaining the importance of sharing and taking turns.

- Children were observed engaging in energetic play outdoors within a secure, fenced area. The space provided ample room for movement, allowing the children to run, explore, and interact freely. This active play supported their physical development, coordination, and social skills in a safe and stimulating environment.

Non-Compliance Information

1. On the day of inspection, it was observed that one of the care rooms did not have enough tables and chairs to accommodate all children during mealtimes. This led to a rushed atmosphere and limited opportunities for social interaction during meals. Mealtimes were staggered, requiring one group of children to finish their meals before the next group could be seated. During this process, children were constantly requested to finish their food promptly to allow their peers to eat. This practice was observed to be in contradiction to the service's own Healthy Eating Policy, which states: "Children that eat slowly will be given time to eat and not rushed."
2. It was observed that not all children had the opportunity to access outdoor play during the day. Some children did not go outside at all, while others were only outdoors for approximately five minutes before being collected by their parents. This limited outdoor access may impact children's opportunities for physical activity, fresh air, and engagement with the outdoor environment.
3. In one of the care rooms there was a noticeable lack of materials available for children to engage with. When queried by the inspector, the adult presented a large box containing play materials; however, these resources were not accessible to the children, thereby limiting their opportunities for independent and spontaneous play.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. In address to both point 1&2, the room in question has implemented a better 'rolling mealtime' situation. This is part of a larger routine and purpose of routine overhaul for this room to allow for better care to be given to the children. Mealtimes no longer disrupt playtime meaning children have more freedom to come to the meal table and return to play, this is coupled with children preparing for outside play at the same time. The group of children is split into two sittings. The first sitting eats while the second sitting play, once the first sitting finish their educator prepares them for outside play while the second sitting eats, then their educator prepares them for outside play. Upon review of this implementation, it has been working. Review thus far of the strategy to address points 1&2 it has been working, however if it proves unsuccessful in the future the service will invest in more tables for mealtime and change to an everyone sitting practice.

- 'Treasure Basket' approach has been reaffirmed for this room where children are able to develop agency in selecting their preferred play resources.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A copy of the team meeting minutes, and attendance has been submitted.

Summary Comment

This regulation is now complaint. The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. The practice will be reviewed on the next inspection.

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 was found to be secured on arrival preventing unauthorised access or exit from the premises.
- Child safety gates were present in the kitchen to prevent children from accessing the area.
- Warm running water was available for hand washing at a temperature below 43°C.
- Cleaning products and equipment were stored out of the reach of children.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall wooden fencing and bolted gates.
- Materials were observed to be in a good state of repair.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean. Adults were observed to be cleaning the premises when and where required, throughout the day of inspection.
- Tables and highchairs were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in both care rooms.
- Foot operated pedal bins were available within the service for safe disposal of waste.
- There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with warm water, liquid soap

and paper towels present. Older children were observed to wash their hands with support, before snacks, meals, after nappy changing and when coming inside from outdoor play.

- Aprons and gloves were available and observed in use by adults when changing of a child was required.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be ventilated using openable windows and mechanical ventilation where windows were not available.
- Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- Children's soothers were kept in individual boxes labelled with the child's name. The inspector was informed that they are cleaned daily, by the adult present.

Administration of Medication:

- When interviewed, adults were aware of their responsibilities for the safe administration of medication. No medication was administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- The service had a designated sleep room with appropriate cots available to children.
- Sleep checks were observed to occur every ten minutes
- The Sleep room temperature was recorded within the acceptable range of 18 to 22°C.

Fire Safety:

- Adults demonstrated clear familiarity with the service's fire safety and evacuation procedures.
- During the inspection, all fire exits were observed to be unobstructed, ensuring safe and immediate access in the event of an emergency.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. On 29 May 2025, a written Immediate Action Notice was issued to the registered provider under Regulation 23 – Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of the Child. A large open grate on the premises posed a significant risk to a child. When brought to the attention of the person in charge he responded promptly by securing the area and ensuring the grate was covered, made safe and inaccessible to children.
2. The windows in one of the care rooms were not fitted with fire safe window restrictors to prevent a child from potentially exiting or falling.
3. Children were observed seated in highchairs without being secured using the provided harnesses, posing a risk of falling. When questioned, adults appeared unfamiliar with the correct use of the harness system and advised the inspector that the straps were not fully working.

4. In the outdoor play area, a wooden pole with a protruding nail was observed, posing a potential injury risk to children. This issue was brought to the attention of the person in charge for prompt action to ensure the area was made safe.
5. It was observed that one of the outdoor bikes was missing a seat. This limited their usability and affected the range of equipment available for children's outdoor play.
6. On the day of inspection, no indoor or outdoor risk assessments were available for review. The absence of these documents meant that the inspector was unable to verify whether potential hazards within the environment had been identified, assessed, and appropriately managed prior to their arrival.

Infection Control:

7. It was observed that there was insufficient space between cots in the sleep room, which poses a risk of cross-contamination and does not support best practices for infection control. Adequate spacing between sleep equipment is essential to ensure a safe and hygienic rest environment for children.
8. No daily cleaning schedules were available for review on the day of inspection. When questioned, adults informed the inspector that these schedules were not being completed. The absence of documented cleaning routines limited the ability to verify that regular and consistent hygiene practices were being carried out across the service.
9. Gloves and aprons were observed not to be removed after disposing of an unclean nappy, and prior to moving onto the next care practice of placing on a clean nappy and redressing the child. This could lead to a risk of cross infection.

Administration of Medication:

10. Each child in the Rainbow Room had an individual bottle of antipyretic (fever-reducing) medication stored on-site. Upon inspection, four of these bottles were found to be expired. While it was acknowledged that the service had an in-date bottle available for emergency use, the presence of expired medication indicates a lapse in the regular monitoring and management of stored medications.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Immediate Action Notice has been addressed and replied to following the Inspection. Maintenance Staff were reminded of the importance of fixing concerns raised by staff in a prompt and timely manner. Indoor and Outdoor Risk Assessments were made available showing the date and time that the grate was noticed

as posing a risk. Maintenance staff have been asked in future to please complete work in a timely manner as there was a passage of 5 weeks between the concern being raised in the risk assessment and the date of the inspection.

2. Upon review, several of the windows have need of repair. Works have been contracted and are estimated to be completed by 25/07/2025.
3. Highchairs without working straps have been removed. Staff have been reminded of the importance of highchair safety in a meeting following the inspection.
4. Nail was removed following the inspection. Perimeter fencing will be more closely monitored in the Indoor/Outdoor Risk Assessment not just for security but for hazards like this. This has been communicated to maintenance staff and staff completing Indoor/Outdoor Risk Assessments.
5. Outdoor toy in question was removed from use. Remaining outdoor play equipment was observed to be in good working order.
6. A copy of the Indoor/Outdoor Risk Assessments Dating from 06/01/2025 until the day of the inspection was forwarded to the inspector on 11/07/2025.

Infection Control:

7. Staff have been made aware of their roles and responsibilities relating to the daily cleaning requirements of the service. Daily Cleaning Checklists are now included in the 'End of Day' Checklist to ensure checks and balances are maintained in filling out the Daily Cleaning Checklists. End of Day checklist will continue to be carried out to maintain compliance.
8. Staff have received a refresher meeting on following the appropriate nappy changing procedure. One of the Supervisors/Deputised Persons have been made aware they are responsible for identifying and checking nappy changing procedures are being followed.
9. Cots have been moved farther apart to support safe sleep practices. Refresher meeting was held in relation to safe sleep practices.

Administration of Medication:

10. All out of date anti-febrile medication has been removed. End of Day checklist includes checks relating to all medicines stored on the premises.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Copy of Risk Assessment with initial concern raised.
- Copy of Signed Declaration relating to the expectations relating to daily cleaning.
- Copy of meeting minutes and attendance.

- Attendance record for refresher meeting.
- Copy of Indoor/Outdoor Risk Assessment since 6th January submitted.

Summary Comment

This regulation is now complaint. The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. The practice 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 firefighting 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) A procedure was in place to practice and record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated the 25/04/2025.
 - (b) A record of the number, type, and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service was on file. Records indicated that the last annual maintenance for the firefighting equipment and the fire detection system was dated 02nd April 2025.
- (4) A fire notice procedure was available in the pre-school rooms.