

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DR024
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Name of Service:	Heatherfield Playgroup
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Address of Service:	Heatherfield, Quarry Road, Rathmichael, Shankill, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	D18 H5W6
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary Whelan
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/05/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	14	PM	n/a
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Level 7, Brunel Building, Heuston South Quarter, Kilmainham Dublin 8
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Inspection undertaken by:	R Phillips
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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	N/A
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Description of service

Heatherfield Playgroup was first established in 1999. The service consists of two adjoining preschool rooms, within a house in a rural setting. The early years' service is registered to provide sessional care to children aged from 2-6 years. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and operates Monday to Friday from 09:00-12:30hrs 38 weeks of the year. An outdoor play area adjacent to the premises, and a separate enclosed field are available to the children.

Staffing

There are four adults employed in the service, including the registered provider who manages the service and works directly with the children.

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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations:

- 9 (1) (2) (3) (4) Management and recruitment,
- 11 (1) (3) Staffing levels,
- 15 (1)(a)-(i) Records of a preschool child,

19 (1)(a) Health, welfare and development of child,
23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child,
25 (1) (2) First Aid, and
26 (1)(a)(b) (2) (c) (4) Fire safety measures.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15, Record of a preschool child.

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.

(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 and named person to deputise as required.
 - (b) The person in charge was present when the inspector arrived unannounced for the inspection. The named person in charge remained on the premises throughout the inspection.
 - (c) There was a clear management structure in place. The manager and staff demonstrated an awareness of their roles and lines of authority within the service.

(2) Following discussion with the manager it was confirmed that two new staff commenced employment since the last inspection on 21st June 2022. Documentation was reviewed in respect of these two adults and met regulatory requirements as follows:

(a)(b)

References had been sourced from past employers and had a record of verification as required.

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

(d) Police Vetting was not required for any of the adults employed by the service.

(3) The procedures referred to in paragraph 2 were carried out prior to the adult's commencing employment in the service.

(4) A record was available evidencing that the adults working directly with the children held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or equivalent.

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) The inspector observed that there was an adequate number of staff working directly with the preschool children.

(3) There were three adults working directly with 14 preschool children.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

Compliance Information

- (1) A sample of 10 records for children were reviewed. The information required was documented as outlined below.
- (a) The name and date of birth of each child.
 - (b) The date when each child first attended the service.
 - (c) A section was available for recording when each child ceases attending the service.
 - (d) The name address and telephone number of parents and information where parents can be contacted.
 - (e) Names and contact details of other adults who are authorised to collect the child.
 - (f) Medical information, allergies, additional needs and other information specific to the child.
 - (g) The name and telephone number of the child's medical practitioner.
 - (h) Immunisation details.
 - (i) Signed parental consent for medical treatment in the event of an emergency.

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

Basic Needs:

Healthy eating was promoted within the service. Children ate a packed lunch brought in from home. The staff sat with the children at low level tables and chairs and engaged in conversation while they ate, promoting a relaxed atmosphere. Water was available to the children throughout the morning, and an alternative lunch offered as required by one child.

The children's independence was promoted, by staff encouraging them to care for their own belongings. The children used the two children's toilets independently, with supervision by sight and sound as appropriate.

The staff demonstrated knowledge of children's individual needs, and modelled inclusion in play and activities.

Supporting Relationships:

The staff demonstrated warmth and affection, offering praise, encouraging independence and managing minor disputes competently. The preschool room had an area for family photos of children and staff, at eye level for the children, to promote a sense of belonging and continuity of care between the service and home.

Physical and Material Environment:

The preschool room was amply stocked with equipment, toys, and arts and crafts materials. The toys were easily accessible to the children. There were defined interest areas, such as; an area with baby dolls, cots and bunks for the dolls, real world items, brushes, and stethoscopes, kitchen/home area and a shop to encourage imaginative play. Small world toys and puzzles were available on low level shelves to promote fine motor activity. Children availed of a rest area with soft furnishings in the library area.

The field facilitated gross motor development, with space to run, slides and a seesaw. The other outdoor play area had a large selection of play equipment stored in a shed, easily accessible to the children.

Programme of Activities

The play observed was child led in terms of the children's choice of activity being facilitated, and the freedom to opt out of an activity respected.

Children's language development was supported through one-to-one conversations, and group discussions, songs and storytelling which were observed during 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

The following are examples of the measures undertaken by the registered provider and staff members to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the children attending the service.

General Safety:

The entrance doors and outdoor area were appropriately secured preventing children from exiting the premises unsupervised and prevented unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.

Thermostatically controlled warm water was available in the children's sanitary facilities.

Cleaning agents were stored appropriately up on high shelving out of reach of children.

The toys and play equipment observed in use by the children on the day of inspection were safe and in good working order.

Infection Control:

Children's hands were washed before meals, after returning from outdoor play and after using the toilet.

Waste was appropriately managed throughout the service with the use of pedal operated bins in the sanitary areas and the care rooms.

Staff were observed cleaning down the tables before and after mealtime.

Administration of Medication:

Medications were stored out of reach of children.

Medications were stored in the original packaging as required.

Staff demonstrated an understanding of the appropriate measures to be taken to safeguard children if medication was required.

A care plan was available for a child with a food allergy. Staff were vigilant to ensure that no lunches contained the allergen.

No child was observed having medication on the day of inspection.

Outing:

The registered provider confirmed that the service doesn't take the children on outings.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

(a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and

(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.

Compliance Information

(1) It was confirmed by review of staff files, and discussion, that the registered provider held an in date First Aid Responder (FAR) training certificate and someone with FAR training was available to the children at all times of opening.

(2)(a) Adequately equipped first aid boxes were stored in conspicuous locations that were easily accessible throughout the service.

(b) The first aid boxes were available to the children in the service at all times.

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.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (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 record was available detailing fire drills that had taken place in the service. The record showed the last fire drill had taken place on 2nd May 2025.
 - (b) There was a record to show that the firefighting equipment had been serviced on 27th August 2024, and that maintenance of the fire detection and alarm system was last carried out on 27th August 2024.
- (2) (c) The records were made available for inspection.
- (4) The procedures to be followed during a fire drill and in the event of a fire were displayed in a conspicuous location within the service.