

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DS216
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Name of Service:	Happy Feet Early Learning Centre
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Address of Service:	1 Blackthorn Hill Close, Rathcoole, Dublin 24, Co. Dublin
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Name of Registered Provider:	Kelly O'Hickey
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date(s) of Inspection:	21/07/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	27	PM	26
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child and Family Agency, Suite 7, Vista Primary Care, Ballymore Eustace Road, Naas, Co. Kildare, W91 X38W
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Mulhern and R. Phillips
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	NA
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Description of service

Happy Feet Early Learning Centre is one of three early years services operated by the registered provider. The service operates from a two-storey facility in a residential area of Rathcoole. An outdoor area is located at the rear of the building. The children are allocated to one of four rooms (Yellow, Green, Blue and Purple) according to their age and stage of development. A separate sleep room is available to children attending the Yellow room (children aged 0 - 2 years). The service offers a full-day care, part-time and sessional service to a maximum of 50 children aged 0 - 6 years from 07:30 to 17:30.

Staffing

There are 15 staff employed to work directly in the service. A 16th (floating) staff member and the registered provider work across the three early years services operated by the registered provider. Eleven staff were present on the day of the inspection including the person in charge and the chef. Nine staff worked 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 areas of governance, health, welfare and development of child and 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 inspectors wish 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

(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.

(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) The service had a person in charge and a named person to deputise.

(b) The person in charge was always on the premises during the inspection. The staff roster provided for the person in charge or a person who could deputise to be present at all times of opening.

The inspection focused on regulation 9 (2)(a), (b), (d) and (4) for three staff members who had commenced working in this service since the previous inspection dated 18 September 2023. Garda vetting disclosures 9(2)(c) were inspected for all staff.

(a) & (b) Appropriate consideration had been given to references prior to the employment of staff. References had been sourced from past employers or from another source where staff had only one or no previous employers. All references had a record of verification checks carried out.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all staff members. Garda vetting disclosures had been renewed in accordance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, which requires services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Not applicable as the staff members had not lived in another state for more than six months as an adult.

(3) Recruitment records were dated prior to staff commencing employment.

(4) The staff members held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum Level 5 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.

(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) An adequate number of adults were working with the children. There were 7 staff allocated to work directly with 27 children with two staff allocated to provide cover for breaks.
- (2) The minimum adult to child ratio requirement for the age of children and type of service provided was always maintained.
- (8)(a) There were at least two staff members on the premises throughout the inspection. The staff roster provided for a minimum of two staff to be on the premises at all times of opening.

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

Basic Needs

The children moved freely within their rooms, engaging in play and activities. They were provided with regular meals and snacks. Drinks were available within the rooms and offered regularly. One infant required bottle feeding and was held by the staff member during this time. The children sat together when eating and the staff provided support as needed. Younger children wore bibs to protect their clothing from becoming wet or soiled. The children had a spare set of clothes available for use if required. Children's coats were hung on low level hangers and boots were stored next to the outdoor area.

Staff supported the children to manage their personal care. Nappy changing was carried out routinely and when needed in between. The older children were supported to use the toilet with an appropriate balance of independence and supervision. Staff prompted the children to wash their hands at appropriate times, helping the younger children as needed.

The staff in the Yellow room (children aged 0-1 year) were attuned to the babies' cues including tiredness and responded accordingly by placing them to sleep in the adjoining cot room. The children in the Purple and Green rooms (children aged 1- 3 years) were provided with an opportunity to sleep after lunch. Staff reported that they accommodate children to sleep outside of this time if they show signs of tiredness. The children slept in cots or low beds according to their age and stage of development. They were made comfortable for sleep with their outer clothing removed, blankets provided, and soothers given to those who used them.

Supporting Relationships around Children

The staff were familiar with the children in their care, discussing their individual routines and their likes and dislikes. The children appeared comfortable with the adults, chatting with them and seeking comfort from them when needed. The staff engaged kindly with the children, addressing them by name and responding appropriately to their wants and needs in a calm manner. Transitions between activities were well managed with staff explaining to the children what was going to happen next. Photographs of the children's families were displayed to support children's connection between home and the service. Staff discussed maintaining connections with families by communicating at drop-off and collection and through use of a two-way communication app.

Physical and Material Environment

A variety of materials, toys and books were available to support children to engage in various forms of play and learning. These included art and craft materials, role play materials, small world toys, puzzles and cause and effect toys. Children's artwork was displayed showing the children's efforts and creativity are valued. Low level tables and chairs were provided for table-top activities and meals. The Yellow room had a large, matted area where infants could engage in floor play comfortably. It included a sofa where the adults could sit and hold the infants when bottle feeding or providing comfort. The Green, Purple and Blue rooms had areas with matting or soft seating where children could rest or take a break from activities.

The outdoor area was surfaced with impact absorbent matting and artificial grass. The area included some natural plants and had equipment to support full body movement and imaginative play. This included ride on toys, a slide, a swing and playhouses.

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:

Measures had been taken to safeguard the children. The entrances and exits were secured to prevent unauthorised entry or children leaving unsupervised. Emergency exits were kept clear to allow for timely evacuation in the event of a fire. Staff reported monthly fire drills are undertaken and demonstrated an awareness of fire evacuation procedures. Heavy furniture was secured to prevent tipping. Items that could pose a hazard were secured out of children's reach including cables and cleaning products.

Infection Control:

Appropriate measures had been taken to minimise the risk of infection spreading. The premises and equipment appeared clean and well-maintained. Staff discussed their cleaning schedules which included regular laundering of fabric items including bed linen. A system was in place for the immediate removal and cleaning of toys which children mouthed in the younger rooms. Sanitary facilities were appropriately equipped to support handwashing. Staff guided children to wash their hands after toileting, nappy changing and before meals. Children's nappies were changed in accordance with the service's nappy changing procedure to minimise the risk of spreading infection. Waste was properly managed using pedal-operated bins, ensuring hands-free disposal.

Administration of Medication:

No children received medication during the inspection. Medications were stored in the original packaging out of reach of children. Staff demonstrated an understanding of how to administer medication safely if required. This included obtaining written parent/guardian consent, having a second staff member witness the administration and making a detailed record.

Safe Sleep:

Children were placed to sleep in cots or on low beds according to their age and stage of development. Staff remained in the room with children where they slept on low beds. Staff were observed regularly checking sleeping children and making a record of the checks on an app which included their position, colour and breathing status.

Non-Compliance Information

Safe Sleep:

The ambient temperature of the cot room used by children attending the Yellow room (children aged 0 – 2 years) was not maintained between 16 and 20°C, posing an increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). The service and the inspector's thermometer readings were 22.4°C at 10:43 when one child was sleeping. The window was opened when this was brought to the attention of staff and management. However, the temperature did not fall below 21°C.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Safe Sleep:

The service has arranged to have a smart air conditioning wall unit installed in the cot room to ensure the ambient temperature is always maintained between 16 and 20°C. The installation is scheduled in the coming weeks. The temperature of the room will be monitored daily and regulated with the assistance of the unit.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of communication with air conditioning unit supplier.

Summary Comment

The actions submitted should address the non-compliance. The effectiveness of the actions will be assessed on the next inspection.

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) A person with First Aid Responder (FAR) training was available to the children throughout the inspection. The staff roster provided for at least one trained person to be available to the children at all times of opening.

(2)

(a) The service had two suitably equipped first aid boxes stored in conspicuous positions.

(b) The first aid boxes were available for use 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.

(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 written record was available detailing fire drills that had been carried out in the service. The most recent fire drill record was dated 17 June 2025.

(b) Records were available detailing the firefighting equipment and fire detection system in the service. Records showed that these had been last serviced in October 2024 and March 2025 consecutively.

(4) The procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed in a conspicuous location in a prominent position.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

The children were appropriately supervised at all times. This included when playing, sleeping, eating and using the sanitary facilities.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had an insurance certificate valid from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026.