

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DY113
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Name of Service:	Links Childcare
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Address of Service:	Corn Mill, Distillery Road, Drumcondra, Dublin 3, Co. Dublin
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Name of Registered Provider:	Gillian Kelly
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date 1 of Inspection:	23/06/2025
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Date 2 of Inspection:	24/06/2025
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No of pre-school children, Day 1 :	AM	74	PM	73
Day 2	AM	75	PM	71

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Child and Family Agency, Unit 4&5 Nexus Building Block 6A, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Dublin 15
Inspection undertaken by:	Á Dunne, E Hosford
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).

Description of service

Links Childcare is a private service one of fourteen operated by the registered provider. The service provides a sessional, part time and full-time service to children aged from birth to 6 years and operates from 7:30am to 6:30pm Monday to Friday. The service participates in the Early Education Care and Education (ECCE) programme which operates from 9:30-1pm. The service operates from two adjacent buildings, in building 1 there are three care rooms which are - the Jellyfish Room (children aged 1 – 2 years), the Octopus Room (children aged 1years 6 months to 2 years 6 months) and the Dolphin room (children aged 2 – 3 years). In building 2 there are two care rooms, The Sea horse room (children aged 3 – 5 years) and the Starfish room (children aged 2 – 3 years). In building 1, the service has use of a large open foyer with an office area, a kitchen and an outdoor play area to the rear, featuring a soft all-weather surface and both buildings have a dining area and sanitary facilities.

Staffing

The registered provider employs 29 staff for the early years' service to include the regional manager, the person in charge, the deputy person in charge, the assistant manager, 20 childcare staff, 1 staff employed under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), 2 cover staff and a chef. A maintenance person is available to the service when required. The registered provider does not work in the service. On Day 1 and Day 2 of inspection, the regional manager, the deputy person in charge, the assistant manager were present in a supportive role to assist staff when required, along with 18 childcare staff and 1 staff member employed under AIM, working directly with the children in the service and the chef. The director of support services arrived at the service on Day 2 at 2.30pm to attend the feedback meeting.

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, premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under the regulations 9, 11, 16, 19, 23, 25, 26 and 28.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 16 Record in Relation to Preschool Service, Regulation 19 Health, welfare and development of child, Regulation 23 Safeguarding, Health, Safety and Welfare of child. Regulation 11 Staffing levels was assessed across all rooms.

The scope of the inspection included all five rooms over 2 days of inspection.

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 regional manager, the deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the two days of the inspection and the Director of support services who attended the feedback meeting on day 2 of 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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

*(b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and
(c) these Regulations.*

Compliance Information

- (1) (a) The registered provider ensured there was a designated person in charge – the regional manager and a named person to deputise as required.
- (b) The designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service on day 1 and was present in the service for the duration of the inspection on both day 1 and day 2.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in the service that identified the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee.
- (2) It was confirmed by the regional manager that 29 childcare staff are employed in the service. The files of 29 staff were reviewed.
- (a) There were 41 written and validated references available from a past employer.
- (b) There were 17 written and validated references available from a source other than past employer
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for 29 adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting was available for 24 adults who had lived outside of the State for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) were carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.
- (4) Documentation was available to show that the 27 adults who worked directly with children attending the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications
- (7)(a) Documentary evidence available demonstrated that new staff receive induction training, a one month and three-month review and a six-month appraisal. All staff members receive training and regular support and supervision reviews where they review their practice in line with the service policy. Review meetings are then held with management where a review of their knowledge of their role, training needs, policy review along with health and safety issues are completed. Staff receive continuous professional development through meetings held

regularly providing ongoing training in for example in curriculum and environments, positive behaviour management, conflict resolution, child protection, transitions, infection control procedures and accident and incident reports.

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) On day 1 and day 2 of inspection, there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service, for example:

On Day 1, there were 22 adults available and caring for 74 children in attendance when the inspectors arrived unannounced in the morning and in the afternoon 21 adults were available and caring for 73 children.

On Day 2, there were 22 adults available and caring for 75 children in attendance when the inspectors arrived in the morning and in the afternoon 21 adults were available and caring for 71 children.

(2) The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during day 1 and day 2 of inspection, as follows:

Day 1:

- In the Jelly fish room, there were 10 children aged 1 years to 2 years being cared for by 4 adults in the morning and there were 11 children aged 1 years to 2 years being cared for by 4 adults in the afternoon.

- In the Octopus room, there were 10 children aged 1 years 6 months to 2 years 6 months being cared for by 4 adults all day.
- In the Dolphin room, there were 16 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 4 adults all day.
- In the Sea Horse room, there were 20 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 3 adults in the morning and there were 19 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 3 adults in the afternoon.
- In the Starfish room, there were 18 children aged 3 years to 5 years being cared for by 4 adults in the morning and 17 children aged 3 years to 5 years being cared for by 3 adults in the afternoon.

Day 2:

- In the Jelly fish room, there were 12 children aged 1 years to 2 years being cared for by 4 adults in the morning and there were 11 children aged 1 years to 2 years being cared for by 4 adults in the afternoon.
- In the Octopus room, there were 10 children aged 1 years 6 months to 2 years 6 months being cared for by 4 adults all day.
- In the Dolphin room, there were 15 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 4 adults all day.
- In the Sea Horse room, there were 21 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 3 adults in the morning and there were 19 children aged 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 3 adults in the afternoon.
- In the Starfish room, there were 17 children aged 3 years to 5 years being cared for by 4 adults in the morning and 16 children aged 3 years to 5 years being cared for by 3 adults in the afternoon.

The regional manager, deputy person in charge and assistant manager were available in a supernumerary capacity to support staff when required.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that there were at least two adults on the premises at all times as evidenced by staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained in the service.

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:

- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured the following:

- (h) Attendance records detailing the arrival and departure of the children on a daily basis were recorded accurately.
- (i) A record was maintained of the staff roster which was reflective of the staff present on the day.
- (j) On review of five medicine administration records dated from January 2024 to May 2025, the required information was present, and the records were complete.
- (k) On review of 20 accident and incident records available, dated from February 2025 to June 2025, the required information was present, and the records were completed.

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

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that no practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful are carried out in respect of a pre-school child whilst attending the service.

Compliance Information

Basic Needs:

- Meals and snacks were provided by the service cooked by the chef in the service kitchen, including a hot meal with a rotating 3-week menu. Breakfast was available from 7.30am to 9.00am, on day 1 of inspection the inspectors observed a morning snack served at 10.30am of sliced fruit, dinner at 11.30am of tomato and spinach pasta, tea at 3.00pm of vegetable soup and homemade bread. On day 2 the inspectors observed the hot dinner at 11.30am of spaghetti bolognese. Additional servings were available for the children, and alternative food was provided for children with special dietary requirements.
- Water was available for the children to drink.
- Mealtimes were held in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere in the dining areas of building 1 and building 2. Staff were observed to sit with and support the children during mealtimes.
- Children were provided with appropriate cutlery to support their independence during mealtimes.
- Nappy changing and toileting were respectful and positive experiences for the children, and the staff members engaged positively with the children throughout the process by chatting to the children in accordance with the service policy. Older children accessed the bathroom independently and staff were observed to encourage the children to be independent in managing their personal care such as handwashing.
- The transitions between activities such as nappy changes, sleep time, mealtimes, free play and outdoor play were observed to be calm, relaxed and organised with staff available to care for the individual needs of the children.

- All children in each room were observed to enjoy outdoor play, during the two days of inspection.
- Children's need for sleep and rest were met through the provision of comfortable rest areas available in each care room. Cots and soft floor mats with individual bedding were available to the children who required sleep. At sleep time, the rooms were darkened and soft music played to provide for a restful environment.

Supporting relationships:

- The inspectors observed supportive interactions taking place between the staff members and children during the inspection as evidenced in the staff members in each care room speaking warmly and positively to and about the children and engaging with the children in a responsive and caring manner. Staff were observed to be engaged with and sit with the children during play time and had positive interactions during play activities for example, water play, play dough and baking.
- Each care room were observed on both days of inspection to be busy, organised, engaging and respectful and the staff members were observed to work well together and supported each other in the care of the children. Staff members updated each other on the children's care throughout the day which ensured the children's care needs were met in a timely manner.
- The service and staff communicated with parents at drop off and collection verbally with reference made to the service handover booklet, completed for each child with details on their child's food intake, toileting and sleep during their day.

Physical Environment and Materials:

- Care rooms were bright, spacious and inviting.
- Low level accessible shelving and child sized furniture supported children's independence.
- The range of play materials and equipment were suitable to the age and stage of development of the children attending the service enabling exploration and development of their play opportunities. Children had the freedom to choose from materials and equipment from areas of interest available to them, promoting child-leading play.
- Cosy areas were present in all rooms offering a quiet comfortable area for children to rest and relax during the day.
- The service valued outdoor play, and this was evident through the continued use of the outdoor area by all children in the service during the two days of inspection. The enclosed outdoor play environment to the rear of building 1 with a soft artificial surface and was divided into two areas. The outdoor toys were suitable and available and included floor games, trikes, ride on and ride in toys and a playhouse.

Programme of Activities and its Implementation:

- Children were observed at sensory play with sensory materials to include painting, sand, playdough and baking during indoor play and with water in the outdoor area.
 - Staff played parachute games in the outdoor area with the children which promoted children's fundamental movement skills.
- (3) No practices that are disrespectful, degrading, exploitive, intimidating, emotionally or physically harmful or neglectful were observed during two days of inspection, in respect of a pre-school child who attended the service. Staff were familiar with the behaviour management policy and prohibited practices.

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:

- On the unannounced arrival on day 1 and on arrival on day 2, at the service by the inspectors, the main entrance door to the service in both building 1 and in building 2 with an button release system which was monitored and controlled by staff, was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises throughout the inspection.
- Care room temperatures were maintained between recommended 18°C and 22°C.
- The kitchen in building 1, was inaccessible to the children throughout two days of inspection.
- Cleaning products were stored out of reach of children and safety locks were observed in use on the fridges and cupboards within the care rooms.
- Blind cords for blinds on windows were secure and safe.
- Visibility stickers were present on doors to outdoor play area.

Infection Control:

- The service was maintained in a clean and hygienic condition throughout, with the premises and equipment observed to be visually clean.

- Windows were observed open throughout the premises to allow for ventilation and fresh air to circulate and mechanical ventilation was available in sanitary facilities.
- Handwashing facilities for hand hygiene included thermostatically controlled water, soap and paper towels and pedal operated lidded bins for disposal of paper waste.
- Handwashing was observed after nappy changing, after bathroom visits, after activities, after outdoor play and before and after mealtimes.
- Nappy changing facilities were available for the children and nappy changing was completed for the children, at set times or when required in accordance with the service policy.
- Soothers were stored in individual labelled boxes.
- Sheets and bedding for each child were stored in individual labelled boxes or bags.
- While children slept in their cots or on floor mats, they were positioned with the required 50cm between them to reduce the potential risk of cross infection

Safe Sleep:

- The sleep needs for children under 2 years of age, were facilitated with access to cots for sleep and for children over two years of age were met through the provision of low floor mats.
- Shoes and outer clothing were removed from children while they slept.
- Staff completed ten-minute sleep checks for children in the service which included each child's colour, breathing, position and room temperature, while children slept.

Fire Safety:

- Monthly fire drills were carried out in the service.
- The designated emergency exit doors were clear and unobstructed

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) The service provided evidence that three adults trained in First Aid Response were available at all times to the children attending the pre-school.
- (2) (a) and (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available and safely stored in easily accessible and conspicuous positions in the service.

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 written record was available of the fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill took place on 9 June 2025.
- (b) A record was available of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment demonstrating it was last serviced January 2025 and for the number, type and maintenance of the smoke alarms in the premises, which were last serviced on the 18 June 2025.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had adequate insurance for a maximum of 90 children attending the service on a full day care basis with an expiry date of 27 March 2026.