

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015DY114
Name of Service:	The Links Creche & Montessori LTD
Address of Service:	East Point Business Campus, Clontarf, Dublin 3,
Eircode:	D03 V972
Name of Registered Provider:	Gillian Kelly
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
Date 1 of Inspection:	24/03/2025
Date 2 of Inspection:	25/03/2025

No of pre-school children:	AM	99	PM	95
Day 2	AM	95	PM	Not reviewed

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Area 1 2nd Floor, Unit 4/5, The Nexus Building, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Ballycoolin, Dublin 15 D15 CF9K
Inspection undertaken by:	Day 1: T Nelson and L Jameson. Day 2: T Nelson
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

The Links Creche and Montessori is a full day care service located in a business park on the north docks of Dublin city and is registered to provide early childhood care and education to a maximum of 114 children aged 0 to 6 years old, Monday to Friday. The service operates an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme sessional service from 9.30am to 1.00pm and is one of 14 services operated by the registered provider.

The Links Creche and Montessori operates from a purpose built two-storey premises and has seven care rooms to include on the ground floor the Baby Room (6 to 18 months old) and Wobbler room (18 months to 2 years 4 months old). On the first floor the Toddler room (2 to 3 years old); Senior Wobbler room (2 to 3 years old); Preschool 1 (3 to 5 years old) and Preschool 2 room (3 to 5 years old). There are sanitary facilities located off each of the care rooms, and cot rooms located off the Baby and Wobbler rooms. Further sanitary facilities are available for staff. A fully enclosed outdoor area is located to the front and rear of the premises.

Staffing

There are currently 33 staff employed by the service including four managers, two chefs and 27 childcare staff who work directly with the children. The registered provider does not work in the service.

There were 27 staff present on both days of the inspection including three managers, a chef and 23 staff working directly with the children. In addition, the HR manager was present on day one, and the Director of Support Services on day two.

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

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following:

- Regulation 19(1)(b) Health, Welfare and Development of child
- Regulation 21 Equipment and Materials
- Regulation 22 Food and Drink
- Regulation 23 Safeguarding the Health, Safety and Welfare of the Child

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Baby, Wobbler and Toddler rooms and did not include the Senior Wobbler, Preschool 1 and 2 rooms.

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 management, 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, 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

The registered provider ensured the following:

- (1)(a) The service had a designated person in charge and named persons to deputise as required.
- (b) A review of the roster showed either the person in charge or the deputy persons in charge were rostered to be present during the operational hours of the service.
- (c) There was a clear management structure in place, and staff reported being aware of this.
- (2) The staff roster was reviewed and discussed with management, and it was established 33 staff work in the service, and these files were reviewed. The registered provider had completed the following checks:
- (a) Fifty-three validated written references were available from recent past employers
- (b) Thirteen validated written references were available from a source other than a past employer
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff members employed. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Documentary evidence showed that 30 adults had lived in a state other than Ireland for more than six months as adults and international police vetting from that state was available for inspection.
- These checks were in line the service recruitment policy which was reviewed on the day.
- (3) Documentary evidence available showed that all of the checks outlined in (2) had been carried out prior to any of the adults having contact with the children in the service.
- (4) The 31 staff 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 or a qualification deemed eligible by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs.
- (7) A review of documentation and discussion with staff showed that all staff working directly with the children service had:
- (a) been provided with appropriate supervision and information and had received training on the policies and procedures in the service required under Schedule 5. The following was reviewed:

- Induction documentation from a sample of eight new staff.
- A review of documentation from ten staff meetings which had taken place since November 2023 showed training and information had been provided on various topics.

(c) been provided with appropriate supervision, information and training on topics including interactions, behaviour management, child safeguarding, health, hygiene and safety. The following was reviewed:

- Documentation from a sample of seven ongoing support and supervision meetings which included the supervision of management.
- Probationary review documentation from a sample of eight staff.
- Documentation was available that all staff who worked directly with children had completed child safeguarding training and staff reported being aware of the relevant practice and procedures.

This was in line with the service staff training and supervision policy which was reviewed on the day.

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.

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the following:

- (1) On both days of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service to meet their care needs. There were 26 staff available to the 99 children present on the morning of the inspection on Day 1 and the 95 children present on Day 2.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were maintained correctly throughout the inspection.

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-

(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

(1)(b) The registered provider ensured the following:

- The interactions between staff and children were observed to be playful, warm, respectful and sensitive.
- Nappy changing was observed to be timely and regular, and children were encouraged to use the toilet independently with staff providing respectful supervision where required.
- The children were assigned to key workers, and provision was made for smaller groups for example at mealtimes and activities. This can facilitate better observation and engagement with children.
- There was a daily routine displayed in the care rooms, and this was reflected in practice supporting familiarity.
- Strategies such as organising and planning in advance facilitated smooth transitions through mealtimes and sleep.
- Staff used positive strategies to manage children behaviour such as running commentary on activities, clear instructions and careful positioning of children and equipment.
- All children had access to appropriate sleep facilities when required.
- Staff reported being provided with sufficient information and support to adequately complete their care practices.
- Children were observed to have the opportunity to move freely throughout the care room and independently access activities of their choice.
- Engagement with families and parents was facilitated through recording information on the 'handover booklet' which detailed the child's food, toileting, sleep and key moments in the day and through conversations at drop off and collection where staff reported that parents come to the door of the room.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the following:

- The furniture provided in the rooms was low level and appropriate for the number, age range and developmental stage of the children attending. The furniture was observed to be well maintained, durable and easy to clean.
- Toys, equipment and play materials were easily accessible and visible to the children on low-level units.
- A cosy area was available in the rooms which allowed a child to take a break from activities and rest.
- The toys and equipment were grouped in themed areas of interest. There was a variety of play materials and equipment available to include: arts and crafts materials, home areas with associated props; range of jigsaws; range of construction toys; sorting and stacking toys; range of toys for transporting such as cars and trains with tracks, small world play toys. Natural real-life materials were also available.
- All equipment and materials available were in good condition and were suited to the age and stage of development of the children in the rooms.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured there was adequate and suitable food and drinks available. For example:

- The service followed a four-week menu plan, and the documentary evidence available showed there was a varied selection of food available, with alternative options for children with additional or alternative diets.
- The service provided all meals which were prepared in the onsite kitchen. Food offered throughout the day was regular and included breakfast from 7.30am, a snack of fruit at 10.00am, a hot meal from 11.30am, and a tea at 3.00pm.

- On the day of the inspection the children were offered a selection of cereals for breakfast, bean and vegetable casserole with rice for dinner and carrot loaf with raisins and fruits for tea.
- Drinking water was freely available in the care rooms throughout the day.
- Staff were aware of the different dietary requirements of the children in their care room and suitable meals and snacks were provided.
- Meals were prepared to suit the stages of development of the children in each care room.
- The children were given support and supervision when self-feeding.

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 registered provider had the following measures in place to safeguard children:

General Safety:

- Entry to the service was secured when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service. There was an electronic door release system in place which was managed and monitored by staff. This restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises and prevented children from exiting the service unsupervised.
- Gates were fitted throughout the floors to restrict the unauthorised movement of children.
- All cleaning agents and sharp equipment were stored out of reach of the children in locked presses or on high shelves.
- Window restrictors were fitted throughout the premises

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and single use hand towels were available at all wash hand basins used by the children and the staff members.
- All children were supported to hand wash after outdoor play and before mealtimes.

- Nappy changing was observed to be carried out in line with appropriate infection control, with disposable gloves and apron removed after nappy change and handwashing completed after.
- Children's nappies creams were individually labelled.
- Soothers were stored in individual lidded containers.
- Appropriate waste disposal units were observed throughout the premises.
- Cots and sleep mats were positioned with appropriate space between them.

Safe Sleep:

- The temperature of the rooms while children slept were within the required range for the age of the children in the rooms.
- A log was maintained where the temperature of the room and the colour, breathing and position of sleeping children was checked every ten minutes.

Fire Safety:

- Fire evacuation procedures were displayed throughout the premises.
- Emergency exits were observed to be unobstructed.