

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL068		
Name of Service:	Circle of Friends		
Address of Service:	101 Pine Ridge, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin		
Eircode:	K32 RF78		
Name of Registered Provider:	Caroline Kehoe		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date of Inspection:	01/05/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	11	PM N/A
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	180-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co Dublin K67 Y5C6		
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle		
Title:	Early Years Inspector		
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		

Description of service

Circle of Friends is a sessional early years' service which was established in 2004 providing preschool care & education to children aged 2 years 8 months to 6 years participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9:15am to 12:15pm Monday to Friday. The service operates from a purpose-built building located alongside the registered provider's family home in Balbriggan north Dublin. The service operates concurrently with a second Early years' service Lorraine's Montessori which shares the same care rooms and facilities. The children have access to 3 interconnecting rooms in the service including a main pre-school room, a smaller pre-school room and a home room. An enclosed outdoor area is located to the rear of the service.

Staffing

The registered providers for both Circle of Friends and Lorraine's Montessori in addition to a staff member employed in the service to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary, to work with children with additional needs, in a post funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme were present and working 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/ 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, 19, 23, 24, 25 and 26; 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.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider for this service and the registered provider for the concurrent service both of whom were present, 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.

(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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service and a named staff member was appointed to deputise when required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service and was present for the duration of the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed. A total of 5 files were maintained in respect of the registered provider, the registered provider of the service operating concurrently, 1 staff member who works in the service on a daily basis and the file for 2 relief staff members.

(2)(a)(b) Two written, validated references were available for the registered provider and for 2 staff members employed in the service.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider and for the 2 staff members. Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) International police vetting was available for the 2 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) Four staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service each held appropriate childcare qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b) Two written validated references were not available for 1 staff member employed in the service.

(4) Documentary evidence was not available to confirm that one staff member whose file was reviewed and who works directly with children in the service held an appropriate childcare qualification on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(2)(a)(b) Two references were provided for this member of cover staff and were validated on 27th May 2024.

(4) The staff member has provided evidence of her QQI Level 5 qualifications.

Preventive Action

A check list has been attached to the staff file to ensure that all staff have 2 validated references, and evidence of qualifications are on file as well as other documents required.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documented evidence was provided.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has stated in an e mail to the Early years' inspectorate on the 26/06/2024 that the member of staff is no longer working in the service. Based on the information submitted the non-compliance has been addressed.

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.

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

(c) a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that, where the person in charge operates the service single-handedly, a second person familiar with the operation of the service and in a position to provide assistance to the person in charge in operating the service is, at all times, within close distance of the service and available to attend the service to assist the person in charge in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

The registered provider designed deputy person in charge and one staff member were working directly with 16 pre-school children present on the premises aged 3 to 5 years attending on a sessional basis.

(8)(c) The registered provider of this service and the concurrent service were familiar with the operation of both services and had 2 relief staff members available in the event of an emergency or the unexpected absence of either registered provider.

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

(1)(a) The following observations are examples of how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the service:

Basic needs:

- The Early year's practitioners were observed warmly engaging with the children throughout the inspection. The practitioners were very familiar with the children and their individual needs and were seen using warm vocal tones, positive language and positioning themselves at the children's level when engaging with them. The children were observed to be very comfortable in their environment and sought out the Early year's practitioners for support and guidance as they required it.
- The children brought their morning snack with them from home, the children's independence was enhanced through encouraging the children to take their turns in cleaning their section of the table and taking their own snack out of the fridge. The early years practitioners sat with the children while they ate chatting with the children and thus creating a calm and social atmosphere. The children's water bottles were available on a low-level table for the children to take and return as they desired throughout the session.
- The sanitary facilities were located alongside the care room, the children accessed the sanitary facilities independently with discreet supervision and support provided as the children required it.
- The children's choice was facilitated in the service. This was observed throughout the inspection as children were supported to follow their play interests with the practitioners assisting the children to locate and set up their chosen play materials. Children appeared comfortable and confident to make choices about their learning, and the practitioners were responsive to children's ideas and requests.
- The practitioners were observed to approach children's behaviour in a positive and calm way. There was an emphasis on praise and encouragement to promote positive behaviour.

Supporting relationships:

- The Early Years practitioners were observed to interact with children in a nurturing, sensitive and warm manner. The practitioners demonstrated their familiarity with the children by talking to the inspector about their observations of the children, interests, personalities and the children's developmental stages.
- The children were supported to engage positively with each other and were encouraged to take turns, share resources and work together when participating in activities, the children were afforded regular praise for their participation in activities and on completion of tasks.
- Parents and guardians were observed being welcomed by the practitioners at the children's departure from the service and the opportunity for updating parents and guardians regarding their children's day in the service was taken at this time.

Physical and material environment:

- In the care room resources were easily available and accessible on low level shelving. The children demonstrated familiarity with navigating their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- The children had access to a range of play resources and equipment located across the 2 care rooms and the home room in the service. Play resources and equipment in the larger care room included a broad range of Montessori materials, arts and crafts resources including a large art easel with paints, musical instruments, transport toys, small world and tabletop resources. Sensory play materials including a sand and water tray were available in an area of the care room and the children's planting pots were on display on the windowsill in the room. In the smaller preschool room to the front of the service construction materials, transport toys, montessori resources, a range of tabletop materials, a dolls house with a range of accessorial equipment was provided. The home room enabled the children to extend their imaginary play through the provision of a kitchen area with play accessories, dress up resources with shoes, bags, glasses and jewellery, a large dolls house, dolls, a dolls cradle and clothes for the children to dress the dolls with.
- A range of books were provided in both of the care rooms to support the children's language development.
- The children's artwork was exhibited on the walls in both care rooms, this supports the children's wellbeing by feeling valued and appreciated.

- An enclosed outdoor area was located to the rear of the service. The area was surfaced with paving stones, a raised wooden playhouse with a cosy area within the house and a large sandpit beneath it with a range of accessorial play equipment was provided for the children to use. Large construction blocks provided the children with the opportunity for collaborative play with their peers and to extend their imagination. A slide and balance boards provided the children with the opportunity for gross motor play along with ride on toys for the children to use. A music wall and play kitchen were also provided. The door between the rear care room and the outdoor area remained open whilst the children were outside providing the children with the choice to go between the 2 learning environments.

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 external doors and side gate in the outdoor play area were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children on high shelving and in locked cupboards.
- The service's designated emergency exits were unobstructed.

Infection Control:

- Liquid soap and paper hand towels were available at the wash hand basins throughout the service. The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet.
- Perishable items which the children brought with them from home for their morning snack were refrigerated.
- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet and outdoor play.

Administration of Medication:

- No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Fire drill records were maintained in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

Garda vetting was available for 1 staff member. However, this vetting disclosure was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

General Safety:

- Up to date Garda vetting has been applied for in relation 1 member of staff in adherence with early years regulatory notice.

Preventive Action

General Safety:

- A check list has been attached to service's vetting folder to ensure all vetting is up to date.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has stated in an e mail to the Early years' inspectorate on the 26/06/2024 that the member of staff is no longer working in the service. This has addressed the non-compliance. The Garda Vetting records will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.*
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that-*
- no person other than-*
 - pre-school child attending the service,*
 - a person dropping or collecting such a child,*
 - an employee, or*
 - an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and*
 - a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.*

Compliance Information

(1) Records demonstrated that the date and time of attendance and departure in respect of each pre-school child is recorded on a daily basis.

(3) (a) All persons other than those listed above in (3)(a)(i) – (iv) were approved access to the service by an employee prior to entry.

(b) Visitor details were entered into the visitors' book, and the inspectors were requested to sign in and out of the service by an authorised employee.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) One of the children present on the day of inspection was not signed into the attendance register. This is a risk in the event of an emergency evacuation of the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(1) The daily child attendance record is marked as each child arrives in the morning by a member of staff. The time and date of arrival is recorded at arrival, and the time of leaving is recorded on the attendance record when the child leaves.

Preventive Action

(1) All staff members have been informed that the arrival time of each child and date on the attendance record must be recorded on arrival and marked again on leaving.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance has been reviewed and accepted.

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 trained in first aid including first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service as evidenced in the staff roster and the in-date FAR certification provided for inspection.

(2)(a) and (b) The first aid boxes were suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions on the premises, out of the reach of children.

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 record was maintained of fire drills which had been completed in the service. Fire drills were conducted on a monthly basis in the service.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the smoke alarms in the premises. The smoke alarms were certified as having been serviced in 15/11/ 2023.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

- (b) A record was not kept of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment in the premises.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(b) Two new fire extinguishers were purchased, and the receipt is displayed to show date of purchase.

Preventive Action

(b) The fire extinguishers will be serviced yearly, and a record kept, alternatively replace with new extinguishers, and display receipt to display date of purchase.

Supporting documentation submitted

Receipt for the purchase of a fire extinguisher.

Summary Comment

The registered provider forwarded a receipt for the purchase of a fire extinguisher from a hardware store. The inspector requested further information to demonstrate that the extinguishers are suitable for use in the premises from a competent person. The registered provider stated on the 23/07/2024 that the service is awaiting a date for a visit from a service engineer to service the fire extinguishers. The non-compliance has not been adequately addresses and remains outstanding.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (b) safe and secure,*
- (d) cleaned, maintained, and repaired, as required, and*

Compliance Information

(b) The premises was safe and was found to be appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the early years' service. The external doors and side gate in the outdoor play area were appropriately secured.

Non-Compliance Information

(d)The outer covering on the arm of the small armchair in the main preschool room was torn with foam exposed.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(d) The outer covering on the small armchair in the main preschool room was recovered to cover the exposed foam and prevent spread of infection.

Preventive Action

(d) Regular checks of worn furniture has been added to the cleaning schedule to prevent the spread of infection.

Summary Comment

Photographic evidence of the repairs to the armchair were requested from the registered provider on the 20/06/2024, the registered provider stated in an e mail received on the 25/06/2024 that the armchair has been removed and replaced. The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 29 - Premises has been reviewed and accepted.