

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015FL145
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	The Links Creche & Montessori Limited
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	St. Olaves, Malahide Road, Kinsealy, Co. Dublin
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<b>Eircode:</b>	K36 NR04
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Deirdre Kelly
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	22/01/2024
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	91	PM	85
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	S. Taaffe and AM Coyle
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not Applicable
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### Description of service

Links Childcare was established in 2008 with this service being one of the company's 13 early years services operated in Dublin city and county which provides sessional, part-time and full day care from Monday to Friday for 51 weeks of the year. The service is registered to cater for a maximum of 114 pre-school children and accommodates pre-school children from 6 months to 6 years of age. School age children are not accommodated. The service operates from 7.30am to 6.30pm whilst eligible children are facilitated to participate on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.30am to 12.30pm, with a further 30 minutes sessional care and lunch provided until 1.00pm for an additional fee. The service is conducted on two levels and within two separate units in a row of commercial premises located in a residential setting. A communal lift and a stairwell are in place in the premises, connecting the two floors. The split level layout of the building facilitates access directly from street level to an entrance hallway and three care rooms on the lower ground floor, namely the Baby Room, the Wobbler Room and the Toddler Room. Separate pedestrian access is facilitated to a different entrance hallway and three care rooms on the upper floor on the opposite side of the building, namely the Senior Toddler Room, Pre-school Ash Room and Pre-school Oak Room. A fully enclosed safety-surfaced outdoor play area, separated by fencing into two distinct spaces, is provided to the side of the premises on the lower ground floor.

### Staffing

A service manager is employed who oversees the operational management of this service, working with a team of 23 staff members who work directly with the children, in addition to a full-time chef. A senior manager and one of the company's two regional managers are present to support the staff and children in this service on a regular basis and when required. A staff member employed by the company to carry out maintenance duties was also present in the service on the day of inspection.

### 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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 22, 23, 25, 26 and 27; however, on inspection an additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 24. 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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, the operations manager, the company's director of support services, the regional manager, the senior manager, the service manager, 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

(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 service manager was the designated person in charge of the service and in her absence the deputy manager would deputise when required.

(b) In addition to the service manager, a senior manager was present when the inspectors arrived unannounced at 9.15am on the morning of inspection. The regional manager arrived on the premises shortly afterwards and was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

A total of 28 staff files were reviewed, maintained in respect of the regional manager, the senior manager, the 24 staff members who work directly with the children in this service, the chef and the maintenance person.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the 28 staff members whose files were reviewed.

(a) Forty-nine written references were from past employers.

(b) Seven written references were from sources other than a previous employer.

- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all 28 staff members whose files were reviewed.
- (d) International police vetting disclosures were available as required for 23 of the 28 staff members who had lived outside the State as adults for more than 6 consecutive months.
- (4) The regional manager, the senior manager, the 24 staff members who work directly with the children in this service all held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be 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.*
- (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.*
- 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 the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.
- The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:
- In the Baby Room there were 10 children (of whom 3 children were aged between 6 months and 11 months, and 7 children were aged from 1 year to 1 year 2 months) being cared for by 4 staff members.
  - In the Wobbler Room there were 13 children aged between 1 year 2 months and 1 year 10 months being cared for by 4 staff members.

- In the Toddler Room there were 13 children (of whom 2 children were aged 1 year 10 months and 1 year 11 months, and 11 children were aged from 2 years to 2 years 2 months) being cared for by 3 staff members.
- In the Senior Toddler Room there were 15 children aged between 2 years 5 months and 2 years 10 months being care for by 4 staff members.
- In the Pre-school Ash Room, there were 19 children aged between 2 years 11 months and 3 years 11 months being care for by 3 staff members.
- In the Pre-school Oak Room, there were 21 children aged between 3 years 8 months and 5 years being care for by 3 staff members.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, as evidenced in staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained in the service.

## 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

The following examples demonstrate how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

#### Basic needs:

- Warm and positive interactions were observed taking place between the staff members and children during the inspection. The staff members were observed engaging with the children using welcoming facial expressions and warm vocal tones and showing a keen interest in what each child was doing. The staff members were observed to employ positive strategies to support children's behaviour, including the use of distraction and re-direction. Language used was found to be positive in tone and adults were responsive to children's interests, needs and developmental stages when interacting with them.

- Children who were able were supported to feed themselves, children who could manage were facilitated to use the toilet independently, and some children put on and took off their own clothing. The children who were not yet toilet trained had their nappies changed regularly and as often as was required.
- The staff members sat with children at snack and mealtimes encouraging conversation in a sociable and relaxed manner.
- Staff members informed the inspectors that the sleep needs of the children in the Baby Room were generally met in line with their home routine but that children would be facilitated to sleep when they showed signs of tiredness outside of their normal routine, if required. The children were observed being placed to sleep when they appeared tired during the inspection. The children in the Wobbler Room, Toddler Room and Senior toddler room were placed to sleep for a scheduled period of rest after dinner, in cots if aged less than 2 years, and otherwise on sleep mats set up in the care rooms.
- The children were facilitated to engage in outdoor play on the day of inspection, dressed appropriately for the cold weather in coats, hats and gloves.

### Supporting relationships:

- Four children in the Baby Room were settling into the service, having commenced attendance within the previous fortnight. These children were gently encouraged to engage with the staff members and to explore the environment and play equipment. At times when the children needed additional support and comforting during their attendance, this was promptly and kindly offered by the staff members, with cuddles, reassuring words and singing provided with soothing effect. Familiar routines were in place and children's transitions were supported in the service as evidenced by the staff members signposting which activities were coming next, including snack and mealtimes, nappy changing, sleep time and indoor and outdoor play.
- The staff members demonstrated sensitivity and responsiveness to each child's needs, likes and preferences and were observed displaying anticipation and appropriate responsiveness when children experienced challenges within the environment and when children chose to change or opt out of activities.
- The staff were observed to build the children's confidence by their support and encouragement especially when the children were developing new skills. The children's independence was encouraged with staff members heard readily providing encouragement and praise for the children's efforts and accomplishments. Staff members responded promptly and kindly when children needed assistance.

- A written record was kept of meals, drinks, nappy changes, sleep times, activities and any other relevant information which was verbally passed on to the parents when collecting their children at the end of the day.

### Physical and material environment:

- The care rooms were laid out in clearly defined interest areas to prompt and support children to engage in self-directed and imaginative play. Interest areas included home and kitchen corners, shop areas, construction areas, arts and crafts zones, rest spaces and library corners.
- The play resources available to the children were accessible and stored on low level shelving which allowed the children to select and replace items and materials of interest. Age-appropriate play equipment to support the development of the children's fine motor skills were provided in the care rooms. These included jigsaws, wooden and plastic bricks, magnets, interlocking plastic toys, threading equipment and peg boards. Musical instruments and a range of wooden play materials were provided in all six care rooms.
- Highchairs were provided in the Baby Room for the youngest children who could not yet sit unsupported and safe floor space was provided in this room to allow the children to explore and move around unhindered by furniture or fixed structures. Climb-through padded wooden tunnels, low-level shelving units with raised edges along the top to allow the children hold and pull themselves to stand, and push-along toys were provided to facilitate the children to engage in physical and gross motor activity through self-initiated movement.
- Sensory play was facilitated in the service. For example, the children attending the Toddler Room and Senior Toddler Room participated in sensory play activities in small groups in the areas directly outside the care rooms through the provision of a sand tray with sand and play equipment.
- A suitable range of books were available in the library areas which provided choice and supported children's language development.
- Children's artwork was on display in each care room.
- Outdoor play was facilitated in the service's outdoor play area located to the side of the premises at lower ground floor level, with fencing in place establishing this space into two distinct areas, each of which was covered in impact-absorbent material. Sit-on self-propel cars, an outdoor kitchen, a plastic playhouse and a wooden climb-through tunnel were amongst the play equipment provided in the section used by the younger children. A range of ride-on toys, an outdoor kitchen, large rubber inter-connecting blocks and a

wooden climbing frame with steps and a slanted ramp provided to access a standing platform and slide were included in the play equipment in place in the section used by the older pre-school children.

## 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 service provided all meals and snacks for the children with a varied and nutritious 3-week menu on display in the premises. A choice from a selection of cereals and overnight oats with fruit was available for breakfast until 9.00am on a daily basis, if required. Banana slices, orange slices and diced pear was provided for morning snack on the day of inspection with peeled and chopped fruit listed for morning snack on the daily menu. A chick pea and chilli bean dish cooked in a tomato-based sauce was served with brown rice for dinner whilst sage and courgette brown scones was served with diced cheese for tea. Special dietary requirements were respected and the menu showed that vegetarian dinner options were provided on a daily basis. Children were given extra portions as requested. The food was appropriately pureed, mashed or diced for the younger children to encourage chewing whilst also reducing the risk of choking. Children who were able were encouraged and supported to feed themselves. The staff members in the Baby Room sat at the children’s level when feeding the younger children, chatting with the children and providing them with an opportunity to feed themselves where appropriate. Water was provided for drinks at mealtimes and snack times whilst the children’s water bottles were available to the children throughout the day, stored on low level shelving. The inspectors were informed that meal plans would be put in place, in collaboration with parents, for children who, on a regular basis, did not eat the food provided in the service.

## 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 entrance doors and gates were secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service. Doorbells were provided at the two main entrance doors leading into the service, allowing parents and visitors to notify staff members of their arrival, in order to facilitate entry to the premises if appropriate.
- Play materials and equipment provided in each care room were observed to be safe and suitable for the age range and developmental stage of the children present.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.
- The water temperature at the hot taps in the sanitary accommodation, the sinks in the care rooms and the outdoor sinks did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of scalding for the children in attendance.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to children at all times during the inspection.

##### Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled running warm water, liquid soap and single use paper towels were available at all wash hand basins in the service.
- In the Baby Room, bottles of breast milk and infant formula milk pre-prepared by parents were appropriately stored in named containers in the fridge. Staff members were observed segregating mouthed toys after use in labelled containers in advance of washing in warm soapy water.
- The children in the service were facilitated to wash their hands before eating and following outdoor and messy play. Children who were toilet trained were gently reminded, and assisted, when necessary, to wash their hands after using the toilet.
- Staff members wore individual disposable aprons and disposable gloves for nappy changing procedures.
- Documented up-to date cleaning schedules were available.

##### Administration of Medication:

- There was pre-signed parental consent for the administration of temperature-reducing medication and administration of medication forms were available to record the details of any medication administered in

the service, should the need arise. No pre-school child attending the service was observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

- Medications were stored safely out of the reach of children.

### Safe Sleep:

- In discussion with the inspectors, staff members described safe sleep practices. The records indicated and staff members reported that sleep checks were carried out and documented at 10 minutes intervals, noting the child's position, colour and breathing pattern.
- All children aged less than 2 years slept in a standard cot on the day of inspection. Based on an examination of the children's attendance records maintained in the service, all children under 2 years of age had access to a standard cot on a daily basis.
- The air temperature in the sleep room was monitored and recorded on a daily basis and maintained within the safe sleep temperature range of between 16 - 20°C. Similarly, the Wobbler Room and the Toddler Room air temperatures were monitored and recorded and maintained within the safe sleep temperature range. A new heating and cooling system had been installed in these rooms since the last inspection.

### Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits were unobstructed.

### Non-Compliance Information

#### Infection Control:

1. Uncovered cushions were observed in the cosy area provided in the Wobbler Room at 9.25am. This posed a risk of cross infection as the inner cushions were not routinely washed and could harbour germs. Children had been present in this room from 7.40am on the day of inspection.
2. One staff member described inadequate procedures in relation to the management of soothers in the service. The inspector was informed that soothers may be placed directly in the microwave sterilising unit after use, rather than first being washed in warm soapy water to remove any food particles or secretions in advance of sterilisation.
3. The steps in the service's nappy changing policy were observed not to be followed when the children from Preschool Room Ash were having their nappies changed:
  - The children did not have their hands washed after having their nappies changed.
  - A staff member was observed not to wash their hands in between changing children's nappies.

### Safe Sleep:

- Inadequate space of between 23 and 28cm was left between a number of occupied cots on the morning of the inspection. Spacing of cots at less than the recommended distance of 50cm apart increased the risk of cross-infection and posed a risk that a child could reach out and disrupt the sleep of or cause harm to another child. It is acknowledged that the senior manager immediately re-positioned the cots appropriately, in advance of further use, when informed by the inspector of the risk to children.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions and preventive actions have been carried out:

#### Corrective Actions:

- The inspection took place on a Monday and as per the service procedures, the cushion covers were washed over the weekend. It is accepted that they were not put on the cushions until 9:25am. The corrective action here is that they were put on the cushions at 9:25am.
- The procedures for washing and sterilising soothers were immediately revisited with the staff member in question and were included for full retraining at February's staff CPD meeting.
- The staff member received full practical retraining in nappy changing procedures, using the bilingual guide available in each nappy bay. A hands-on training session, for revision purposes, formed part of the February CPD training for all staff.
- As mentioned above, the inspection took place on a Monday. A deep professional clean is done every weekend. The cleaners had moved the cots for access. When it was brought to the attention of staff by the inspector, the cots were moved back to their correct spots, at least 50cms apart. This was approved by the inspector.

#### Preventive Actions:

- To avoid this happening again, the Manager/Deputy Manager/Assistant Manager will ensure that the washed covers are placed on the cushions immediately after the crèche is opened.
- The topic featured in the February CPD and will be regularly monitored by senior staff members in rooms where soothers are in use.
- Regular training is provided for staff and monitoring is constant.
- The Manager will check that any cots moved by the cleaners (or for any other reason) will be returned at the start of the morning to their rightful places.

### **Supporting documentation submitted:**

- A copy of the electronic presentation delivered at the service's staff meeting in February 2024, which included training in relation to the management of soothers and nappy changing procedures.

### **Summary Comment**

The corrective actions and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified on inspection in relation to Regulation 23 and this regulatory requirement has been met.

## 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-*

*(a) no person other than-*

*(i) pre-school child attending the service,*

*(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,*

*(iii) an employee, or*

*(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and*

*(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.*

### **Compliance Information**

(3)(a)(b) A system was in place to ensure that no person other than the children and their parents or guardians, employees, approved students or authorised visitors could enter the service. A visitor's book was maintained and on arrival the inspectors were requested to record their attendance on the premises and the purpose of their visit.

### **Non-Compliance Information**

(3)(a)(b) The service did not maintain accurate details of all children in attendance during the inspection as evidenced in the following findings:

- At 9.40am the attendance records in Pre-school Oak Room indicated and the inspectors were informed by the staff members present that 16 pre-school children were present in the care room. However, 18 pre-school children were present at that time.

- At 10.20am when the inspector was confirming the number of children present in the Baby Room and their ages, it was evident that a child was present in the care room since 9.50am who had not been entered in the attendance record.
- At 10:30am a child attending the Senior Toddler Room was not signed into the attendance record, this was confirmed with a member of staff. At 12:15pm this child's attendance remained undocumented in the attendance register.

This posed a risk of children not being accounted for in the event of an evacuation emergency.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions and preventive actions have been carried out:

#### **Corrective Actions:**

The importance of having fully accurate records of attendance in each room is fully accepted and the staff have been retrained on this essential health and safety aspect of crèche life.

#### **Preventive Actions:**

The Regional Manager will do regular spot checks on her visits to the crèche and the records will be monitored by the Management team throughout the day.

#### **Supporting documentation submitted**

A copy of the electronic presentation delivered at the service's staff meeting in February 2024, which included training in relation to attendance records.

### Summary Comment

The corrective action and preventive action submitted by the registered provider have addressed the non-compliances identified on inspection in relation to Regulation 24 and this regulatory requirement has been met.

### 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) Based on a review of the staff members' First Aid Response (FAR) training records and the service's staff roster, it was evident that the registered provider ensured that a person with in-date FAR training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.
- (2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes available in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations on both floors on the premises and these were available for the children in attendance, in the event of an emergency.

### 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 record was maintained of fire drills which had been completed in the service. Based on the records maintained and as reported by staff members, fire drills were carried out monthly. The last recorded fire drill took place on 03/01/2024.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. Fire extinguishers were certified as having been serviced in January 2024 and the smoke detection system was serviced on 13/12/2023.
- (4) The evacuation procedure was conspicuously displayed on the premises which contained details in relation to the procedure to be conducted in the event of a fire or emergency in the service.

## 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

On the day of the inspection the inspectors observed the staff members appropriately supervising the children both indoors and outdoors and also when the children were moving between spaces. For example, staff members were observed purposely positioning themselves in front and behind the groups of children as they moved from the care rooms on the first floor, down the communal stairs, out of the building and back in through the reception area and Toddler Room on the ground floor to reach the outdoor play area. The children were encouraged to stay close together and were heard singing travel-themed songs as they made their way under the supervision and encouragement of staff members.