

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL148
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Name of Service:	Links Childcare
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Address of Service:	Castleland Park, Balbriggan, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	K32 CH79
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Name of Registered Provider:	Deirdre Kelly
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	27/06/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	71	PM	56
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Coyle & S Taaffe
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

Links Childcare currently operates a total of 12 early years services in Dublin city and county. Links childcare Balbriggan is registered to cater for a maximum of 115 pre-school children aged from 0-6 years providing care to children on a sessional, part-time and full day care basis. The service also provides care to school aged children. This service is conducted from a purpose-built 2 storey premises in a residential area of Balbriggan Co Dublin. There are 6 care rooms and 2 separate sleep rooms in the service. The service operates from 7.30am to 6.30pm each weekday whilst eligible children are facilitated to participate on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.30am to 12.30pm daily.

Staffing

The service employs 21 staff members including the service manager who coordinates the day-to-day operational management of the service and a full-time chef. The regional manager was present in the service from shortly after the service had commenced and provided assistance across all care rooms as required. The company's director of support services was present for the closing meeting at the conclusion of the inspection. The registered provider was not present in the service during the 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, premises and facilities. The inspections may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 21, 23, 25, 28 and 29. 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.

Additional Information

An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the registered provider on the day of inspection due to ambient air temperatures which were in excess of the optimum air temperature of 16-20°C in the sleep rooms and Toddler room where children were sleeping in the service. The registered provider provided the inspectorate with written assurances of appropriate preventive actions being implemented in the service to reduce the likelihood of the ambient air temperatures exceeding 16-20°C within 24 hours of the notice being issued.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the person in charge, staff, children and the regional manager 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 there was a named person available to deputise as required.

(b) The service manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced on the morning of the inspection.

A total of 22 staff files were reviewed including the file for the regional manager; 21 staff members work directly with the children attending the service.

(2)(a) & (b) Two written, validated references were available for the 22 staff members whose files were reviewed.

(a) Forty-two references were from past employers.

(b) Two references were from reputable sources.

- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the 22 staff members whose files were reviewed.
- (d) International police vetting was available for 18 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that, of the twenty-one staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service, twenty-two held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications 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.*
- (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 working directly with the children attending the service.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced on the morning of inspection and remained so throughout the inspection.
- The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:
- In the Baby room there were 6 children aged between 11 months and 15 months being cared for by 3 staff members. Additionally, from 09:50am–12 midday a baby aged 10 months was present in this room, settling into the service as part of their induction programme.

- In the Wobbler room there were 11 children (of whom 10 children were aged between 1 year 4 months and 1 year 10 months and 1 child who had recently celebrated their second birthday) being cared for by 3 staff members
- In the Toddler room there were 14 children aged between 2 years and 3 years 1 month being cared for by 3 staff members
- In Pre-school Oak there were 15 children aged between 3 years 9 months and 5 years 1 month, all attending on a part-time or full day care basis, being cared for by 3 staff members.
- In Pre-school Ash there were 17 children aged between 2 years 10 months and 3 years 11 months, all attending on a part-time or full day care basis, being cared for by 3 staff members.
- In Pre-school Elm there were 7 children aged between 3 years 11 months and 4 years 6 months, all attending on a sessional ECCE being cared for by 1 staff member.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, verified by staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained at 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

(1)(a) The following observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life of the service.

Basic needs:

- Mealtimes observed on the day of inspection were social and relaxed experiences, the staff members sat with the children engaging them in conversation whilst encouraging the children's independence with eating and provided support as required. The staff members in both the Baby room and the Wobbler room positioned themselves at the children's level while assisting the children to eat and encouraged the children's independence.

- Nappy changing was carried out regularly and promptly when required. The staff members were observed to use this time as an opportunity for warm one to one interaction with the children, singing and chatting to the children throughout the procedure. The children who were toilet trained were supported to be independent in using the toilet with supervision and assistance provided to the children when required.
- The individual sleep needs of the children were accommodated in the service. The children in the Baby room were placed to sleep in the sleep room adjacent to the care room when they exhibited signs of tiredness and if their sleep times coincided with mealtimes they were provided with their meals when they woke up. The children in the Wobbler room went to sleep after their dinner in a designated sleep room alongside the front entrance to the service. The staff members in the Wobbler room stated that if the children required sleep at other times this was facilitated. Rest areas including mats, cushions and appropriately sized couches were provided throughout all the care rooms should the children chose to take a break from activities at any time throughout the day.
- Staff members used distraction and problem-solving techniques to good effect to prevent the escalation of any minor issues that took place between the children.

Supporting relationships around children:

- Throughout the inspection the staff members were observed to be caring, kind and attentive in their interactions with the children and demonstrated warmth and sensitivity to each child's individual needs.
- Settling in was observed to be managed well in the service. For example, one child in the Baby room was transitioning into the service, attending for their second time on the day of the inspection. The staff members were observed providing extra comforting and attention to this child using warm and gentle touch and tones in their efforts to engage and support the child and following the child's lead as they explored the environment, to very good effect. A child in the Toddler room who was in the process of gradually transitioning to Pre-school Ash was facilitated to spend a period of time after morning snack until dinner time in their new room to allow the child become accustomed with the new group and environment.
- The Staff members greeted children and parents individually on arrival, spending time conversing and sharing information in a welcoming and friendly way. A record of the children's meals, drinks, nappy changes, sleep times, activities and any other relevant information was maintained for children attending the Baby room, Wobbler room and Toddler room and shared with parents at collection.

- Family photographs were on display in the care rooms which supports children to bridge the gap between the service and home.

Physical and material environment:

- Each care room was well resourced with a broad range and quantity of equipment, toys and materials to extend the children's learning and support their development. The children in the care rooms demonstrated familiarity with navigating their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- The care rooms were laid out with a variety of interest areas including well-resourced home areas with a range of equipment for the children to extend their play with including crockery, cooking utensils, dolls with clothes and play cradles. Construction resources, transport toys, arts and crafts materials, a broad range of small world toys and tabletop toys were available throughout all of the care rooms.
- A wide range of books were available throughout all of the care rooms in the service to support the children's language development.
- The safety-surfaced outdoor play area to the rear of the premises offered the children opportunities to engage in physical play. The area was divided with portable interlocking fencing into two separate sections which maximised the number of care rooms that could be outside at any one time. Equipment provided including a large climbing frame with steps, a rope ladder, wooden steps, a climb through tunnel and a slide all available on the climbing frame. Ride-on toys, a playhouse and an outdoor kitchen were provided for the children to play with. Staff members were observed to bring additional resources outside for the children to use.

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 provides all snacks and meals to the children attending on a full day care. The children who attend the ECCE programme bring their own snack with them from home. All other snacks and meals are prepared on site by the chef, a 3-week menu demonstrating that a varied and nutritional choice of food was on display in the service. Dietary requirements specified by the parents were accommodated, as stated on the menu and observed in practice during the inspection. The food available on the day of inspection reflected the menu provided and was in keeping with the service's healthy eating policy.

Breakfast of cereal and milk was available to the children who require breakfast up until 9am.

A selection of fresh fruit including apple, banana and strawberries were provided to the children at 10am. The children attending the Preschool room Elm for the sessional ECCE programme brought their own packed lunch with them from home including sandwiches, fruit, cheese and yogurts.

Spaghetti Bolognese was served for dinner at 11:30 am in the Wobbler room and from 12 midday in the remaining care rooms.

At 3pm the children had afternoon tea of garlic bread with cheese along with vegetable sticks

The children attending the Wobbler room who require infant formula bring their own milk from home which is stored in the fridge in the care room. Water was freely available on low level shelves for the children to access as required during the day in the care rooms and was positioned beside the children whilst they had their meals.

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 front doors leading into the service was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The outdoor play areas were fully enclosed and secure which reduced the risk of children exiting unsupervised and restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the outdoor space and premises.
- The service's designated emergency exits were unobstructed.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided to support effective hand hygiene in the sanitary accommodation and at the wash hand basins in the care rooms in the service. Apart from the noncompliance listed below the children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, after nappy changing and following messy play and outdoor play.
- Soothers were labelled and stored in personalised containers when not in use. Labelled containers were provided in the care rooms for the segregation of mouthed toys after use. Staff members clearly described appropriate procedures for the management of mouthed toys and soothers, including washing the items in advance of sterilisation.
- The premises, play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition.
- Up to date documented cleaning schedules were on display in the service.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- All children aged less than 2 years had access to and were observed sleeping in a standard cot provided in either of the 2 sleep rooms in the service.
- The inspectors observed that 10-minute sleep check observations were being performed and documented on all sleeping children, noting each child's colour, position and breathing pattern at the time of each check.
- Adequate space of at least 50cm was left between the cots in the sleep room during the inspection and between the sleep mats set up in the Toddler room after lunch.

Fire Safety:

- Staff members were familiar with the safe evacuation procedures with children in the event of an emergency occurring on the premises. Fire exits were not obstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. Some of the children attending the Toddler room were observed not to have their hands washed after they had their nappies changed.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

Infection Control:

1. It is regrettable that any such lapse in practice was observed by the inspectors. The staff in the toddler room were immediately retrained by the Manager and were further monitored by the Regional Manager in the coming days.

Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. The nappy changing policy is clearly printed in each nappy bay (in both English and Spanish) and forms a major part of both induction and on-going CPD. Hand washing is emphasised at every stage of training and will continue to do so. Monitoring of this key hygiene area will continue

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child 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) One person trained in first aid including first aid responder (FAR) training was immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(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.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) One staff member only was trained in FAR training. From a review of the staff roster this staff member is not available in the service at all times during the operational hours of the service. For example, from 17:30pm to 18:30 pm on 26/06/2023 and on 28/06/2023 none of the rostered staff members held in-date FAR training.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

(1) There is newly appointed Assistant Manager at the crèche who is enrolled at the next two-day FAR course for the company, to take place next month. Her certificate will be available for inspection immediately after the course.

Preventive Action

(1) The arrangement of courses, including FAR, is done by a specific staff member at Head Office who ensures that there is always a qualified person on the premises. However, at the moment with a national staffing crisis and the return of so many staff to Spain for the summer it has proved to be very difficult to ensure full compliance in this area. As stated above it will be rectified very soon and will continue to be monitored in the new academic year when hopefully service will see some improvement in the crisis.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 25 - First aid has been reviewed and accepted.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that the service was adequately insured to cover up to 115 children attending, including on a full day care basis. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28/03/2023 to 27/03/2024.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

Non-Compliance Information

The ambient air temperature of the following rooms was not maintained between 16-20°C when the children were sleeping. It is acknowledged that the staff members opened the door from the sleep room to the corridor and opened the windows in the Toddler room to enhance ventilation. An Immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider in relation to the raised ambient air temperatures.

Location	Room Temperature	Time
Baby room sleep room	23.7°C	10:23am
	23°C	12 Midday
	25.3°C	1.45pm
Wobbler room sleep room	24.9°C	12:45pm
	25.3°C	2pm
Toddler room (when children were sleeping)	24.7°C	12:40pm

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

In response to the Immediate Action Notice of 27/06/2023 the following actions were taken. Actions to reduce temperature:

1. The maintenance team was contacted and when the crèche closed on the day of the inspection a safety gate was fitted between the Wobbler and Toddler room. This means that the door can be left open allowing the breeze from both Wobbler and Toddler windows to combine and circulate. During the day we have found that by opening this door there was a significant increase in the circulation of air.
2. A fan is used in the Toddler Room (at a safe height) when the children are asleep.
3. All doors and windows are opened early and left open all day to allow continuous circulation.

Preventive Action

These methods were found to be successful and, when coupled with the safety gate as described above, will ensure safe temperatures into the future. The situation will be monitored daily by the Manager who will liaise with the Regional Manager with update.

Supporting documentation submitted

1. Photographs of room thermometers indicating ambient air temperatures maintained at acceptable level.
2. Temperature logs.

Summary Comment

The evidence submitted by the registered provider in relation to regulation 29 - Premises has been reviewed and accepted.