

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015FL148
--------------------------	-------------

<b>Name of Service:</b>	Links Childcare
-------------------------	-----------------

<b>Address of Service:</b>	Castleland Park, Balbriggan, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin
----------------------------	---

<b>Eircode:</b>	K32 CH79
-----------------	----------

<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Deirdre Kelly
-------------------------------------	---------------

<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
----------------------	--------------------------------

<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	26/08/2024
----------------------------	------------

<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	70	PM	68
-----------------------------------	----	----	----	----

<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>	AM Coyle & S Taaffe
<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
---------------------------------	----------------

### Description of service

Links Childcare currently operates a total of 13 early years services in Dublin city and county. Links Childcare Balbriggan provides pre-school care and education to children aged from 0-6 years 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 24 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 on the day of inspection and provided assistance across all care rooms as required. The company's director of operations 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. 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, 26 and 28. 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 director of operations, regional manager, 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

(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 regional manager was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person available to deputise as required.

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

Following a review of previous inspection records and in discussion with the regional manager it was confirmed that there were 14 new staff members working in the service since the last inspection, 13 of whom work directly with the pre-school children. The complete files maintained for these 14 staff members were viewed by the inspectors. Garda vetting disclosures were reviewed for a further 8 staff members.

(2)(a) &(b) Two written, validated references were available for the 14 staff members whose complete files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the 14 new staff members. In addition, the files for the 8 remaining staff members were reviewed specifically in relation to their Garda vetting disclosures and these records demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available for 11 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 13 staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with the children in the service including the service manager and the area manager 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 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 5 children aged 1 year 3 months to 1 year 7 months being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Wobbler Room, there were 7 children aged between 1 year 8 months and 2 years being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Toddler Room, there were 15 children aged 2 years to 2 years 8 months being cared for by 3 staff members.
- In the Pre-school Ash Room, there were 19 children aged 2 years 11 months and 3 years 11 months being cared for by 3 staff members.
- In the Pre-school Elm Room, there were 11 children aged 4 years 6 months and 6 years 1 month being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Pre-school Oak Room, there were 13 children aged 3 years 5 months and 4 years 4 months being cared for by 2 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

(1)(a) The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service.

#### Basic needs:

- The staff members were observed to be respectful and warm in their interactions with the children in their care. The staff members were observed initiating conversations, listening to and responding to the children in an interested and affirmative manner.
- Breakfast was available for children each morning, if required. Food was prepared on-site on a daily basis and a varied and nutritious 4-week menu was on display. On the day of inspection, a variety of diced fruit was served for morning snack and a vegetarian pasta dish with spinach and tomatoes was served for dinner. Freshly baked focaccia bread was provided for tea. Special dietary requirements and preferences were respected. Staff members sat with the children at mealtimes, chatting and providing assistance as required with plenty of time allowed for the children to eat without rushing which created a relaxed atmosphere. The youngest children in the service who could not yet sit unsupported were placed in highchairs at mealtimes and the remaining children sat at tables on age-appropriate chairs including some with splayed legs and sides to support children to sit stably. Drinking water was available and accessible to the children in the individual care rooms and when outdoors. All children except the children accommodated in the Baby room were taken to Activity Street, a room on the ground floor, for mealtimes.
- The children had their nappies changed regularly and in a timely manner with the staff members observed warmly engaging with the children throughout the procedures and taking the opportunity to chat with and sing songs to the children. Toilet trained children were supervised discreetly when using the toilet and support was given when needed.
- The children's sleep needs were met during the inspection. The children in the Baby room were observed being placed to sleep when they showed signs of tiredness during the inspection. The children in the remaining care rooms who still availed of a daytime nap were placed to sleep for a scheduled period of rest after dinner, in cocoon beds and on sleep mats set up in both the Wobbler Room and the Toddler Room. Staff members informed the inspectors that children would be facilitated to sleep when they showed signs of tiredness outside of their normal routine, if required. Children who required it were observed being supported to settle to sleep, with the staff members observed sitting with and calmly soothing children using gentle touch and tones of voice. Each room has spaces equipped with soft matting and cushions for children to rest or relax during the day and children were observed spontaneously accessing these areas for short periods of rest during the inspection.
- Outdoor play was facilitated for the children in all the care rooms on the day of the inspection with the children dressed appropriately before going outside.

### Supporting relationships:

- The staff members in each care room were observed speaking warmly to and about the children in their care. In discussions with the inspectors, staff members demonstrated an awareness and understanding of supporting children, including those who needed additional help, to participate in activities in a positive and meaningful way. Child-led play was encouraged and supported and the children were observed engaging in activities using play equipment of their own choice under the guidance of the staff members, with assistance provided when necessary.
- A written record of the children's meals, activities and, if relevant, nappy changes and sleep were maintained and shared verbally with parents when the children were being collected from the service. The children and parents were greeted by staff members in a friendly and familiar way on their arrival to and departure from the service. Family photographs were on display which supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service.
- Familiar routines were in place and children's transitions were supported in the service as evidenced by the staff members observed signposting which activities were coming next, including snack and mealtimes, nappy changing, sleep time and indoor and outdoor play. Train-themed songs were sung by the staff and children as they moved to and from Activity Street at dinnertime. Family photographs on wall displays and in laminated albums supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service and maintained links with family and home. A number of children were present in the service for the first time on the day of inspection, for shorter spells as part of their transition into the service. The staff members were observed using gentle and reassuring tones of voice, praising and gently encouraging the children to explore their new environments and access the play resources as desired, to good effect.

### Physical and material environment:

- The care rooms were laid out in clearly defined interest areas to prompt and facilitate the children to engage in play and support their learning. Interest areas included home areas with kitchens, dolls, buggies and baby care items to support role play opportunities; shop areas; construction areas; arts and crafts zones, and library corners. A suitable range of age-appropriate books were provided in each room to provide choice for the children and support their language development.

- The play materials were stored on low-level shelving to facilitate the children to select and replace items of interest independently. A wide range of tabletop materials were available while wooden play materials were particularly evident throughout the service. Jigsaws and manipulative toys, small world toys including vehicles, animals, people and figurines, wooden and plastic bricks and musical instruments were amongst the play materials provided. Sensory play materials including sand trays and playdough were provided in the care rooms.
- Stable props and push along toys were provided in the Baby Room and the Wobbler Room and outdoors, to support the children to engage in physical and gross motor activity through self-initiated movement.
- The fully enclosed outdoor play area which was located to the rear of the premises was divided by fencing into a space designated for use by children attending the Baby Room, Wobbler Room and Toddler room, a space for the older pre-school children, and a separate space for school age children. The areas accessed by pre-school children were fitted with an impact-absorbing surface. A large wooden climbing frame with a rope ladder, wooden steps, a climb through tunnel and a slide attached, and an outdoor kitchen were included in the play materials and equipment provided in the section used by the older pre-school children. A plastic playhouse, push-along toys and sit-on self-propel trikes were amongst the play materials provided in the section designated for the younger pre-school children. Additional play materials including cars and dress-up costumes were taken outdoors with the children to facilitate further play opportunities.

### 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 doors leading into the premises were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. Access to the premises was facilitated by a staff member who, having sight of callers through the glass panels on the front door of the service, opened the secured door to facilitate entry. A fingerprint system was in use to allow staff members gain entry into the service.

- The outdoor play area was enclosed by boundary walls and gated fencing secured with high level latches to prevent unauthorised persons from gaining entry or a child from gaining unsupervised access to a roadway or other source of danger.
- The warm water temperature in the sanitary accommodation did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C which reduced the risk of scalding for the children.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely on high shelving out of reach of children.
- The windows in the care rooms were fitted with restrictive opening devices and blind cords were appropriately secured.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to children on the day of inspection.
- All furniture and equipment were in good condition and suitable for use by the age groups in each room.

### Infection Control:

- The service's nappy changing policy was adhered to during nappy changes observed on the day of inspection. Suitable disposable gloves and aprons were available and observed being used and disposed of by staff members after each individual nappy change. Staff members washed their own hands and supported the children to wash their hands after each nappy change. Additionally, the children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play.
- Pedal operated lidded nappy bins were provided for the disposal of nappies in the sanitary areas which reduced the risk of cross-infection.
- Thermostatically controlled running water, liquid soap and paper hand towels were available at the wash hand basins in the service.
- Tissues were available for wiping noses and appropriate hand hygiene practices were observed being undertaken when staff members assisted children to clean their noses.
- The service was visibly clean and up to date documented cleaning schedules were on display.
- Soothers were stored in personalised lidded containers when not in use. In discussion with the inspectors, the staff member described appropriate use of the microwave steam sterilisers provided for sterilising soothers and appropriate management of mouthed toys in the service.
- 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:

- 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.
- Adequate space of at least 50cm was left between the individual cots in the sleep room adjacent to the Baby room and the sleep mats set up in the Flower Room, when children were sleeping.

### Fire Safety:

- The records reviewed on inspection indicated that fire drills were practiced on a regular basis to familiarise both adults and children of the correct procedures to follow in the event of a fire.

### Non-Compliance Information

#### General Safety:

1. Children in preschool Ash room were facilitated to engage in a tray-top play activity using standard shaving foam during the inspection. The product label on the can included the statements "*keep out of the reach of children*" and "*use only as directed*". This product posed a risk of causing skin irritation plus toxicity if swallowed.

#### Safe Sleep:

2. On the day of the inspection two children aged 1 year 10 months were observed sleeping on standard sleep mats approximately 3cm in height, set up on the floor of the Wobbler Room after dinner. This practice was at variance with the national best practice safe sleep guidelines which states that when a floor bed is used for a child aged less than 2 years it must be fitted with a firm and perfectly fitting mattress of at least 6cm in depth that is designed for the specific floor bed.
3. Sleep plans incorporating robust risk assessments were not available for the 2 children who slept on standard sleep mats or for 2 other children who were observed sleeping in cocoon beds, all 4 of whom were aged less than 2 years, to demonstrate the children's developmental readiness to move from a cot to floor bed.

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

#### Corrective Action

The registered provider stated in the CAPA response that the following actions were taken to address the non-compliances.

#### General Safety:

1. The use of shaving foam is not allowed in any of their settings. On this occasion the very enthusiastic and new staff brought in the shaving foam from home and began using it without the knowledge of the Manager. Immediate retraining was done by the Regional Manager.

### Safe Sleep:

2. The fact that two children under 2 were on sleep mats was caused by human error. The Educarer in the room used the birthday wall to check ages, instead of the official record and there were errors on the wall. The children's second birthday were imminent. As the Inspector observed, there were plenty of the of floor beds available and these children could and should have been on them. This was rectified immediately.
3. Manager was unaware of the format of the Sleep Plan needed for floor beds and had been using their own Risk Assessment only for an older child who, for safety reasons, could not sleep in a cot. A Sleep Plan was designed the day after the inspection and has been completed in consultation with parents for any child on a floor bed.

### Preventive Action

#### General Safety:

1. The training provided by the Regional Manager dealt with safe substance for sensory play. This was done with the three Educarers in the room but also the full staff was reminded to use only what is provided by the Management Team and this will ensure safety always.

#### Safe Sleep:

2. The Manager will double check ages before a child of 2 years transfers to a sleep mat. The use of the Sleep Plan below will provide focus at the time of transition.
3. The Sleep Plan mentioned above will be used for all children transitioning from a cot to a Floor Bed into the future and this will immediately rectify the non-compliance. Manager is grateful to the Inspectors for their guidance and assistance on this.

### Supporting documentation submitted

#### General Safety:

Training Sheets were provided.

#### Safe Sleep:

Example of a Sleep Plan was provided.

### 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 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

(1) The service maintained accurate details of all children in attendance during the inspection. The children were entered as present on attendance records in each care room, noting each child's arrival and departure times.

(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 visitors' book was maintained and on arrival the inspectors were requested to record their attendance on the premises and the purpose of their visit.

### Part VI - Safety

#### Regulation 25 - First aid

*(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.*

*(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-*

- (a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and*  
*(b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.*

### Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider ensured that a person trained in first aid for children was immediately available to the children attending the service at all times as evidenced in the training records and staff roster.

(2)(a)(b) First aid boxes were suitably equipped and stored in readily accessible and conspicuous positions in the service.

## Part VI - Safety

### Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

*(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-*

- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and*  
*(b) the number, type and maintenance record of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.*

*(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.*

### Compliance Information

(1)(a) A 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 for the whole service took place on 21/08/2024.

(b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. The fire extinguishers were certified as having been serviced in January 2024 and the smoke detection system was certified as being serviced on the 21/06/2024.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises