

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015FL149
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	Links Childcare
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	Station Road, Portmarnock, Co. Dublin
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<b>Eircode:</b>	D13 A212
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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>	29/08/2024
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	46	PM	46
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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 currently operates a total of 13 early years services in Dublin city and county with this service catering for pre-school children from 6 months to 6 years of age in addition to school aged children on a sessional, part-time and full day care basis. The service operates from 7.30am to 6.30pm each weekday for 51 weeks each year, closing for a week after Christmas. Eligible pre-school children are facilitated to participate on the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 9.30am to 1.00pm daily. The service is conducted from a purpose built 2 storey building in a residential area in Portmarnock in north Co Dublin. There are 6 care rooms in the service, namely the Baby Room, the Wobbler Room and the Toddler room located on the ground floor while Preschool Oak, Preschool Ash and Preschool Elm are located on the first floor. The spacious hallway on the ground floor, known as Activity Street, is set up as a dining room at mealtimes.

### Staffing

A service manager is employed who oversees the operational management of this service while supporting the staff and children and leading a team of 11 staff members who work directly with the pre-school children, 2 staff members who work specifically with the school aged children and a full-time chef. The regional manager was present in the service during the inspection and provided assistance across all care rooms when necessary. The registered provider was present in the service for a period of time during the inspection and the company's director of operations was present for the closing meeting at the conclusion of 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, 20(1)(b), 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 service manager was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The service manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced at 9.00am on the day of inspection. The service manager was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed. These consisted of 16 files maintained in respect of the 12 staff members employed to care for pre-school children in this service, for the 2 staff members who were working with school aged children, for the chef, and for the regional manager.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the 16 staff members whose files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 16 staff members. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available as required for each of the 12 staff members who had lived outside the State as adults for more than 6 consecutive months.

(4) The regional manager and all 12 staff members employed to care for pre-school children in the service 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.*

*(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 on the day of inspection and remained correct throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed when the highest numbers of children were present in each care room during the inspection:

- In the Baby Room there were 6 children (of whom 3 children were aged 9 – 10 months and 3 children were aged 1 year 2 months to 1 year 4 months) being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Wobbler Room there were 11 children aged 1 year 6 months to 2 years 5 months being cared for by 2 and sometimes 3 staff members.
- In Toddler Room there were 12 children aged 2 years 10 months to 3 years 4 months being cared for by 2 staff members.

- In Preschool Oak there were 17 children aged 3 years to 4 years 5 months being cared for by 3 staff members.
- School aged children were accommodated in Pre-school Ash on the day of the inspection. Pre-school children are accommodated in this room during term-time each morning when the ECCE programme is in operation.
- Pre-school Elm was vacant on the day of inspection. Pre-school children are accommodated in this room during term-time each morning when the ECCE programme is in operation.

The service manager, deputy manager and regional manager provided relief and support to the care rooms at mealtimes, and for nappy changing and break cover during the inspection.

(8)(a) Based upon a review of the service's staff roster and staff sign in records it was evident that the registered provider ensured that there were at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.

### 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 responsive in their interactions and with meeting the needs of the children in their care, displaying sensitivity, warmth and positive regard for the children throughout the inspection.
- Food was prepared and cooked in the service on a daily basis and a varied and nutritious 4-week menu was on display in the premises. A selection of cereal is provided to children for breakfast if required. On the day of inspection, a variety of diced fruit was served for morning snack and a beef tagine with rice was served for dinner. Freshly baked orange cake was provided for tea. Dietary requirements specified by the parents were accommodated, as stated on the menu and observed in practice during the inspection.

The staff members sat at the children's level at mealtimes, including when feeding the younger children and supporting the children to feed themselves where appropriate. Mealtimes were observed to be social, interactive occasions with the children in each room given plenty of time to eat and not rushed.

- The children had their nappies changed regularly and in a timely manner. Staff members were observed warmly engaging with the children during these procedures and taking the opportunity to chat with and sing songs to the children. The staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues to use the toilet and prompting and support were provided when required.
- In the Baby Room staff facilitated child-led sleep schedules by following children's individual routines and responding to children's cues of tiredness by promptly settling them to sleep in their cots. The children in the Wobbler Room in addition to the children in the Toddler Room who still availed of a day-time nap were facilitated to sleep after dinner, in cots or on sleep mats depending on their age.
- Outdoor play was facilitated for the children in all the care rooms on the day of the inspection. Staff members were observed applying sunscreen (appropriately using each child's own labelled supply) in advance of going outdoors on the sunny day on which the inspection occurred and ensuring that the children were dressed appropriately and drank water when outside.

### Supporting relationships:

- The staff members in each care room were observed speaking warmly to and about the children in their care. 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. Staff members were heard using soft tones of voice and appeared interested and enthusiastic when engaging with the children, including times when the staff members acted as play partners with the children indoors and also when playing running and chasing games outdoors.
- Laminated family photographs were available in albums in each room which supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service. It was observed during the inspection that a staff member facilitated a younger child to interact with their older sibling at dinner time in Activity Street for a period of playful interaction.
- Staff members recorded information regarding each individual child's snacks and meals, activities, and nappy changes and sleep times if relevant, and this information was shared verbally with parents when they were collecting their children at the end of the day.

- Children’s behaviour was managed in an age-appropriate and positive manner with distraction and problem-solving techniques used to good effect to prevent any minor issues from escalating.

### Physical and material environment:

- In each care room, play materials and equipment were accessible on low-level shelving to facilitate children’s independent choice and play. Age-appropriate table-top games and 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, shape sorters, magnets, interlocking plastic toys, stacking toys, threading equipment and peg boards.
- The care rooms were laid out in designated areas of interest including suitably resourced home corners with baby care items and dress up costumes, construction areas, arts and crafts areas, and rest areas. An adequate number of books were provided in each room to support the children’s language development and provide choice for storytelling.
- The Baby Room and the Wobbler Room contained equipment to provide opportunities for the youngest children in the service to engage in physical activity through self-initiated movement with padded floor mats, covered foam wedges, wooden wall-mounted activity centres and push-along toys provided to support the children’s gross motor development. Wall-mounted mirrors supported the development of the children’s visual senses.
- The fully enclosed outdoor play area which was located to the rear and sides of the premises was divided by fencing into separate spaces with one designated for use by children attending the Baby Room, one space for the Wobbler Room and one space for the Toddler Room while the fourth most spacious area was designated for use by the children accommodated in the remaining care rooms. The sections used by the children attending the Baby Room and the Wobbler Room were surfaced with impact-absorbent material while newly laid artificial grass surfaced the remaining areas. Age-appropriate play materials including playhouses, outdoor kitchens, ride-on toys and push-along toys were provided in each section.

## Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

### Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

*(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-*

*(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.*

#### Compliance Information

(1)(b) The sleep room which adjoined the Wobbler Room contained 11 standard cots, with a further 3 foldable cots available in the service, ensuring that all children aged less than 2 years had access to a standard cot on a daily basis. A sufficient number of sleep mats were available in the service for children aged 2 years and older. The rest areas provided in the care rooms were suitably equipped with mats, cushions and soft seating to facilitate children to relax and rest comfortably if they wished to do so during the day.

## 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 leading into the service and the garden gates were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- 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.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the children during the inspection.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children in locked presses or on high shelves.
- Stairways were fitted with appropriate handrails and children were observed to be appropriately supervised when using the stairs.
- The windows in the care rooms were fitted with restrictive opening devices and blind cords were appropriately secured.

### Infection Control:

- The service's nappy changing policy and hand washing policy were observed to be followed by staff members during the inspection. Suitable disposable gloves and aprons were available and observed being used and disposed of appropriately when children were having their nappies changed. 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.
- Tissues were available for wiping noses and appropriate hand hygiene practices were observed being undertaken when staff members assisted children to clean their noses.
- Thermostatically controlled running warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service, at the sinks in the care rooms and at the outdoor taps in the garden.
- In the Baby Room and Wobbler room bottles of infant formula/ milk pre-prepared by parents were appropriately stored in labelled feeding bottles in the fridge.
- Soothers were stored in personalised lidded containers when not in use. Portable microwave sterilisers were available in the service. In discussion with the inspector, staff members clearly communicated appropriate management of soothers and mouthed toys on a daily basis.
- Pedal operated lidded nappy bins were provided for the disposal of nappies which reduced the risk of cross-infection.

### Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection. In discussion with the inspector, staff members described appropriate procedures for the administration of medication to children when required in the service.

### Safe Sleep:

- 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.
- 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.

### Fire Safety:

- The designated emergency exit doors were clear and unobstructed.

### 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 in attendance records provided 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 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.

### 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 service as evidenced in the staff roster and the in-date FAR certifications provided for inspection in respect of 3 full-time staff members.

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

### 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. The most recent fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 20/08/2024.

(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 alarms were serviced on 21/06/2024

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

### Part VI - Safety

#### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

### Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 85 children attending the service on a full day care basis. The policy showed that the service was insured until 27/03/2025.