

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL150		
Name of Service:	Links Childcare		
Address of Service:	Latchford Place, Clonee, Dublin 15, Co. Dublin		
Eircode:	D15 HD63		
Name of Registered Provider:	Deirdre Kelly		
Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional		
Date(s) of Inspection:	09/01/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	76	PM 77
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate 2 nd Floor, Unit 4/5, The Nexus Building, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Ballycoolin, Dublin 15 D15 CF9K		
Inspection undertaken by:	T. Nelson and 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		

Description of service

Links Childcare is one of twelve services currently operated by the registered provider. Established in 2010, this service provides a full day, part time and sessional service to a maximum of 109 children, ranging in age from 0 to 6 years old. The service operates from 7.30am to 6:30pm on Monday to Fridays and the participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme which is delivered from 9.30am to 1.00pm.

The service is located in a purpose built premises in a residential area of Clonee, in the west of Co. Dublin. There are 5 care rooms in the service. On the ground floor is the Junior Wobbler Room (12 to 18 months), Senior Wobbler room (18 to 24 months) and Pre-School Elm which provides sessional care only from 9.30am to 12.30pm. There are nappy changing facilities located directly off these rooms, and a cot room located off the Junior Wobbler Room. There is also a reception area, an office and the service kitchen located on this floor. On the first floor is the Toddler room (2 to 3 years) and two Preschool rooms, Preschool Ash and Preschool Oak which provide care to children from 2 years and 8 months to 5 years. There are nappy changing facilities and sanitary accommodation available on this floor for children and staff, and a staff room. An enclosed outdoor space is located to the rear of the premises, which is partitioned into three separate areas by fencing.

Staffing

There are currently 24 staff employed by the service including the regional manager, the person in charge, two deputy persons in charge, a chef, and 19 childcare staff who work directly with the children. There were 22 adults present throughout the day of the inspection, including the operations manager and the child protection officer. The registered provider does not work in the service.

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(1)(2)(a)(b)(c)(d), (3)(4); 11(1)(4)(8); 17; 19(1)(a); 22; 23 and 32. However, on inspection an additional non-compliance was identified under Regulation 29. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under following:

- Regulation 9(1),(2)(a)(b)(c)(d), (4) Management and Recruitment
- Regulation 19 (1)(a) - Health, Welfare and Development of child
- Regulation 23 – Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Junior and Senior Wobbler rooms, Toddler room and Preschool rooms Oak and Ash and did not include Pre-School Elm room. Regulation 11 was inspected across all rooms.

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 staff and children, person in charge, managers and child protection officer 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 had a designated person in charge and named person to deputise as required.

- (b) The person in charge was present during the inspection, and a review of the roster showed the person in charge or deputy person in charge were on the premises at all times.

The files of 16 staff were reviewed, who were new to the service since the last inspection held on the 22 February 2023. The registered provider had completed the following checks to ensure the staff members were suitable and competent:

(2) (a) Twenty-three validated written references were available from recent past employers.

(b) Nine validated written references were available from a source other than a past employer.

- (c) Completed Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the 16 staff members, which had been dated within the previous 36 months.
- (d) Documentary evidence showed that 15 adults had lived outside of the state for six months or more as an adult and international police vetting from that state was available for inspection.
- (3) Documentary evidence was available that checks had been carried out prior to the staff members commencing in their posts.
- (4) The 16 staff who worked directly with children attending the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed eligible by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs.

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.*
- (4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-*
- (a) a sessional pre-school service, and*
 - (b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).*
- (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 were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service to meet their basic care needs. There were 23 staff available to the 76 children on the morning of the inspection.

(4) The adult to child ratios were correct when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service and throughout the inspection. Nineteen staff were allocated to work directly with the 76 children who were present on the morning of the inspection with a breakdown as follows:

- Junior Wobbler Room: 4 staff to 10 children aged between 12 to 20 months old.
- Senior Wobbler Room: 4 staff to 12 children aged between 18 to 24 months old.
- Toddler Room: 4 staff to 13 children aged between 2 years and 6 months to 3 years and 6 months old.
- Preschool Elm Room: 1 staff to 6 children aged between 2 years and 8 months to 4 years old.
- Preschool Oak Room: 3 staff to 19 children aged between 2 years 8 months to 4 years old.
- Preschool Ash Room: 3 staff to 16 children aged between 3 to 5 years old.

(8)(a) The review of the staff roster provided for a minimum of two adults to be on the premises during the service's operational hours.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured the following information was available to parents.

- Information on the staff ratios, type of service, age range of children, type of care programme, facilities and the opening hours were available in the parents' handbook, displayed on notice boards throughout the service and on the service website.
- A copy of the required policies was available on the service website.

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 registered provider ensured the child's learning, development and wellbeing was facilitated in the service through the following examples:

Basic Needs:

- Nappy changing and toileting were observed to be timely, positive experiences for the children with staff engaging in a respectful manner with the children. Children who were toilet training were observed to be encouraged and praised in their efforts and were changed immediately out of wet clothing in a sensitive manner when needed.
- Staff ensured all children had appropriate clothing in place such as hats, gloves to support their comfort outside, and heavy clothing and shoes were removed before sleep time.
- Children were observed to be encouraged to independently tend to their personal care needs, for example in the Junior Wobbler room children were assisted in taking off their shoes for sleep time and in the Pre-School Oak room a child was warmly praised for wiping their nose, and sensitively reminded to hand wash after this.

Supporting Relationships:

- The staff interacted with the children in a respectful, warm and sensitive manner. Appropriate verbal and nonverbal communication such as low tones, eye level contact, touch and other strategies such as encouragement and praise were observed. These strategies can facilitate emotional and social development in young children.
- Engagement with families and parents was facilitated via conversations at drop off and collection where the information on the child's day which is recorded in the room handover book was shared with parents. Staff reported how information such as updated menus, and monthly events were emailed to parents, with the January events including learn a new hobby and inventors' day as some of the events parents were encouraged to collaborate with. This engagement with families can foster a sense of welcome and identity for children.

- The transition from one experience to another in the day was supported through the use of positive strategies such as song, repetition, timely indication of what was going to happen next and routine. This can promote a sense of predictability and comfort for young children.

Physical and Material Environment:

- The care rooms were bright and spacious, with images of the children and their families, and recent products of their artwork displayed throughout the rooms. This can facilitate the child's feeling of belonging in the service.
- The furniture in the rooms was suited to the age and stage of the children attending. Toys and equipment were stored on low level shelving, visible to the children. This facilitated independent decision making in play, where children could move freely throughout the room, and access play materials and equipment of their choice.
- The layout of the furniture in the rooms encouraged different types of play such as large group, small group, paired and individual play. This can encourage children to engage with their peers at a pace suited to their needs.
- The toys and equipment available in the indoor and outdoor play environments provided for a range of play experiences including creative and imaginary play, language play and physical play. These play experiences can support children's cognitive, communication, social and physical development.

Programme of Activities:

- Children were given the opportunity to choose and lead in their own activities and were encouraged to participate in adult led group activities. Staff were observed displaying anticipation and positive responsiveness when children chose to change or opt out of activities. A child in Pre-school Oak was asked what would they like to do instead, when they stated they did not want to participate in the baking activity. Alternative activities of playdough and cars and trucks were provided.
- Staff reported the transitions of new children starting in the service are supported by a phased settling-in process according to the age of the child and type of care the child is registered for. The use of key workers, and activities and resources such as songs, props and role play were reported as useful strategies for this transition.
- Plans for children's learning were available, and children's emergent interests were documented in order to further plan for their play experiences.

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 ensured there was adequate and suitable food and drinks available. For example:

- The service followed a three-week menu plan, and the documentary evidence available showed there was a varied selection of food available, with alternative options for children with additional and alternative diets and a record of food preferences was maintained.
- Food offered throughout the day included breakfast on arrival, fruit at 10.00am, a hot meal at 12.00pm, and a tea at 3.30pm. On the day of the inspection the children were offered chicken casserole with potatoes for lunch, and carrot and raisin bread with apples for tea. Additional portions were available.
- All food was prepared in the onsite kitchen.
- Drinking water was freely available in the care rooms throughout the day.
- Children were observed to be encouraged to participate in the mealtime experience, with alternative options such as pasta or rich with a tomato sauce provided for those children who chose not to eat what was offered.

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

The service had the following measures in place to safeguard children:

General Safety:

- There was an electronic face recognition system in place to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises, and a button operated exit switch which was up high out of reach of children to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised.
- All cleaning agents and sharp equipment were stored out of reach of the children in locked presses or on high shelves.

- The kitchen was inaccessible to the children in the day of the inspection.
- All openable windows were fitted with restrictors.
- Stairways were fitted with appropriate handrails, and children were observed to be appropriately supervised when using the stairs.
- All internal doors had handles were up high out of reach of children, and gates were also fitted at all doors.
- The outdoor area was fully enclosed.

Infection Control:

- The premises were in a clean and hygienic condition and documented up to date cleaning records were available and displayed in the premises.
- Liquid soap, thermostatically controlled warm water and appropriate hand drying facilities were available at all wash hand basins used by the children and the staff members and staff were observed supporting children to hand wash before and after mealtime, after outdoor play and after nose cleaning.
- Children were provided with individual drinking cups.
- Childrens soothers were stored in individual lidded containers.
- Nappy changing was observed to be carried out in line with the service policy and appropriate infection control practice, and there was an adequate supply of aprons and gloves available.

Safe Sleep:

- A log was maintained where the temperature of the room and the colour, breathing and position of sleeping children was checked every 10 minutes.
- Children were provided with appropriate facilities for sleep. Children under the age of two were provided with an individual, labelled cot, and children over the age of two were provide with a sleep mat and individual bedding.

Fire Safety:

- Fire exits were unobstructed.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. A bottle of children's temperature reducing medication was observed on the countertop of the sink in Senior Wobbler room, which was within reach of children. This posed of risk of injury if ingested by a child.

2. The mains lead from the radio in the Senior Wobbler room was unsecured and accessible to the children. This posed a risk of injury to the child.
3. There was no evidence available that staff in the Senior Wobbler room had checked for risks or hazards in the outdoor play area on a daily basis. The playground policy risk assessment sign sheet available stated a risk assessment must be completed prior to entering the outdoor play area. Daily risk assessments identify hazards and minimise potential risks to children.

Infection Control:

4. The serving bowl for dinner in the Junior Wobbler room was placed uncovered on the sink unit in the room while children's hands and a tray from a highchair were washed. Childrens meals were observed to be served from this bowl after this washing had taken place. This increased the potential risk of cross contamination.

This was identified as a previous non-compliance, and the actions put in place failed to prevent a re-occurrence.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Corrective Action: Staff were reminded that medication must be returned to the normal storage place immediately following use. This and all other medication are stored in a locked cupboard at the reception area.

Preventive action: The members of the management team were reminded of the need to be extra vigilant about returning medication to its correct storage place. The service state this was a 'one off' incident but the Regional Manager will monitor to ensure compliance.
2. Corrective action: The radio with the unsecured lead was immediately removed from the room and when needed a wireless one is borrowed from Reception pending the purchase of a new one.

Preventive action: The Manager checked all rooms for similar issues but there were none. This will be included in weekly reviews.
3. Corrective action: Staff have been retrained on Risk Assessment Forms for the garden.

Preventive action: Risk Assessment for the garden was included in the CPD training for all staff on 10 January 24 and will continue to be monitored by the Manager.

Infection Control:

- Corrective action: The bowl is now placed on a nearby shelf and staff have been told of its new location and the importance of keeping it away from the sink.

Preventive action: As this non-compliance had been noted at an earlier inspection, it was decided as a further measure to place a sign for staff in each of the rooms where there is the potential for this to reoccur, indicating that the serving bowl must not be placed at the sink area.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- Photographic evidence of appropriate storage for medication.
- Photographic evidence of radio removed.
- Copies of recent completed risk assessments.

Evidence of staff CPD training day.

Infection Control:

- Photographic evidence of new serving point.

Photographic evidence of signage reminding staff.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

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*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Non-Compliance Information

(c) In the Junior Wobbler room, the care room temperature was recorded below the recommended ambient temperature of 18-22°C. The inspector recorded a temperature of 15.2°C at 10.53am and 14.6°C at 11.10am. Room temperatures must be maintained between 18-22°C for the child's comfort while engaging in play activities.

(e) The water temperature in the wash hand basin used by the children in the Senior Wobbler sanitary area exceeded the recommended temperature of 43°C. A temperature of 47.8°C was recorded by the inspector at 12.08pm. This posed a potential scald risk to the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(c) Corrective action: The room temperature in the Junior Wobbler Room (and all other rooms) was monitored by the Manager and Deputy Manager several times each day during the cold spell of weather and has been observed to be within the recommended temperature range at all times. At CPD training on 10 January staff were reminded to be very vigilant about room temperatures and to let Management know immediate if they had any concerns.

Preventive action: The Regional Manager has been doing spot checks to ensure compliance and will continue to do so.

(e) Corrective action: A staff member placed something in the press where the thermostat is held, and they inadvertently touched the gauge and altered the temperature of the water. It was fixed immediately after it was brought to the attention of the Manager.

Preventive action: The press will no longer be used for storage to avoid a reoccurrence and the Manager will regularly check the gauge to ensure a safe water temperature.

Supporting documentation submitted

- (c) Evidence of staff CPD training day.
- (e) Photographic evidence of press where thermostat is housed.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 29 have been adequately addressed.

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-
- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,
 - (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and
 - (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that-
- (a) a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and
 - (b) the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a)(b)(c) There was a complaints policy available detailing the procedures to be followed for making a complaint, the manner in how the service deals with a complaint, and the procedures for keeping the complainant informed of this process.
- (2)(a)(b) There was a record available of complaints made to the service, and there was evidence available that complaints were dealt with according to the service complaints policy.