

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL233
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Name of Service:	Natural Start
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Address of Service:	Apple Blossom Cottage, Ballymadrough, Donabate, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	K36 K002
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Name of Registered Provider:	Irene Teeling
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	27/11/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	6	PM	0
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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:	S. Taaffe
Title:	Early Years Inspector

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

Natural Start is registered to operate an early years service each weekday, accommodating a maximum of 22 pre-school children aged 2½ – 6 years on a sessional basis. Eligible children are facilitated to participate in the early childhood care and education (ECCE) scheme from 9.15am to 12.15pm daily, with the option provided to avail of an extra 30 minutes from 12.15 – 12.45pm for an additional fee. The service operates for 38 weeks each year, closing for school holidays. School aged children are not accommodated in the service. The service is located on a spacious site in a rural setting and is conducted predominantly outdoors, with a purpose-built pre-school room which is attached to the registered provider's private residence provided and used on the occasions when particularly inclement weather conditions prevail.

Staffing

The registered provider and 1 staff member work directly with the children in the service on a daily basis.

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.

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 inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, staff member 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,

(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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service and the staff member was appointed to deputise in her absence when required.

(b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service at 9.30am on the morning of inspection.

The staff files for the registered provider and the staff member were reviewed.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written references available for the registered provider and 2 written, validated references available for the staff member.

(a) All 4 written references reviewed were from past employers.

(b) Not applicable as the 4 reviewed references were from past employers.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the registered provider, the staff member and an adult male relative who resides in the family home. 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 2 adults who had resided outside the Irish jurisdiction for a period of greater than 6 months as adults.

(4) The registered provider and staff member held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or had been issued with a letter of eligibility to practice following an assessment of their qualification by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1) During the inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) On the day of inspection, the registered provider and 1 staff member were working directly with 6 pre-school children aged 3 years 2 months to 4 years 10 months who were all attending the service on a sessional basis. The attendance records showed and the registered provider confirmed that currently no more than 10 children are present in the service on any given day.

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 are examples of how the children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic needs:

- The service embraces outdoor play and learning with the children observed enjoying meaningful play and discovery outside with their peers throughout the inspection.
- The children were dressed appropriately in warm winter clothing including waterproof jackets and trousers, coats, hats, scarves, gloves and rubber boots which ensured their comfort in the frosty weather conditions that prevailed on the day of inspection.
- The registered provider and staff member sat with the children at snack time in the covered lean-to open-sided structure adjoining the pre-school room. The adults were observed modelling positive behaviours by eating their own healthy snacks while encouraging conversation and extending interactions with and between the children in a friendly and relaxed manner.
- The adults were observed to be responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with discreet supervision and assistance provided when required.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The registered provider and staff member were observed using welcoming facial expressions and warm vocal tones when engaging with the children and showed a keen interest in what each child was doing. The adults were observed affirming and offering meaningful praise and encouragement to the children for their efforts and involvement in activities.
- The adults were observed engaging in play and activities with the children at an individual, small group and larger group level.

- Children's behaviour was observed to be skilfully managed in a positive and caring manner as the adults approached children's behaviour in a calm and supportive manner and used a problem solving approach to conflict resolution.
- The adults communicated with parents and guardians on a daily basis, both informally during drop off and collection, and electronically on a regular basis through the service's secure smartphone messenger application which enabled the parents to visualise their children's experiences in the service and also to communicate with the service.

Physical and material environment:

- The children appeared comfortable, happy and relaxed in their surroundings.
- An appreciation of the environment, plant and animal life and nature were dominant themes in the service where the children were readily facilitated to engage with the natural world in the extensive outdoor area which contained a large number of mature trees, hedging, plants, grass and clay-covered areas and mounds.
- The registered provider and staff member facilitated the children to explore the outdoor area and engage in the natural resources in areas of their own choosing using sticks, twigs, leaves, stones, mud, off-cuts of wood in varying lengths, hoes, shovels, spades, buckets and diggers which fostered the children's imagination and problem-solving skills. Designated interest areas were established in the outdoor environment which included a large sand pit with a large range of digging materials, a mud kitchen with a wide range of equipment and utensils and a stone-surround meeting circle, in addition to ride on toys, a large outdoor blackboard and a wide variety of seating. The children were observed engaging enthusiastically with the frozen and melting ice during the inspection, discussing their changes in state, and also participating in a volcano activity using vinegar and baking soda in the outdoor sand pit with support from the adults.
- The indoor pre-school room was well resourced with a wide range and quantity of play equipment and materials including real, natural and sensory materials; specialist Montessori equipment; a home corner; construction area; art and crafts materials; small world, jigsaws and manipulative toys; and a reading and relaxation area.

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 following are examples of the measures undertaken by the registered provider and staff member to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service:

General Safety:

- The garden gate and 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.
- The outdoor play area was secured by fencing and hedging to prevent a child from gaining unsupervised access to the roadway, neighbouring fields or other source of danger.
- A detailed risk assessment of the outdoor area was conducted by the registered provider on a daily basis to identify any potential risks to children attending the service. The risk assessment included a review of weather conditions taking account of wind speed and the risk of hypothermia and heatstroke; the presence of litter and animal faeces; the risk of falling branches, and the risk of eye injuries from shrubbery.
- The warm water temperature at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation and at the low-level sink in the care room was thermostatically controlled and maintained at less than 43°C to facilitate hygienic hand washing without risk of scalding the children.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely on high shelving out of reach of children.

Infection Control:

- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet and when required during the inspection. There was running warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels available for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the service.
- Tissues were provided for nasal hygiene, both indoors and outdoors, on the day of inspection and appropriate hygiene practices were observed when the adults assisted children to blow their noses.
- A refrigerator was available and used to store the children's snacks which were provided from home by the parents, reducing the risk of bacteria growth in perishable food items.

- The sanitary accommodation, pre-school room and indoor play equipment and materials were in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. No child attending the service required any medication to be administered on the day of inspection.

Outings:

- The registered provider stated that the service does not undertake outings away from the premises.

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 daily attendance records, 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 log was maintained and on arrival the inspector was requested to record her attendance on the premises.

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 who was present on the premises at all times when the service was in operation held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training which ensured that a person with FAR training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.
- (2)(a)(b) The first aid box was suitably equipped and easily accessible to the adults and available at all times for the children when in attendance at 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 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 written record was available of the monthly fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill was carried out on 23/10/2024.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. The fire extinguishers and the smoke alarms were both certified as having been serviced in October 2024.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was 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 22 pre-school children attending the service on a sessional basis. The policy showed that the service was insured until 27/03/2025.