

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015FL330
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Name of Service:	Tots & Swots
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Address of Service:	Unit 4 Balbriggan Retail Park, Balbriggan, Co. Dublin
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Eircode:	K32 P997
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Name of Registered Provider:	Mary Simons
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	12/10/2023
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	14
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin.
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Cully & S. Taaffe
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	Not Applicable
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Description of service

Tots & Swots is a privately owned early years service conducted from a unit of an industrial estate located in Balbriggan. The service is registered to provide full day care to children aged 2 – 6 years, however the service currently only enrolls children from the ages of 2.5 years of age. The service operates from 7.30 am to 6.30 pm Monday to Friday and participates in the Early Childhood and Education (ECE) scheme from 9.30 am - 12.30 pm 38 weeks of the year. The service has 3 care rooms; Bunny room and Panda room located on the ground floor and Squirrels room located on the first floor. A sensory room is also provided on the first floor, with sanitary accommodations located on both floors. The early years service adjoins a soft play centre that is closed to the public on weekdays and fully available to the children attending the service at appropriate times. There is an outdoor play area available on the premises. The service is also registered to provide School Age care.

Staffing

The registered provider has employed a manager and deputy manager to coordinate the day-to-day operations of the early years service. Ten staff members are currently employed to work directly with the children attending the early years service. In addition, 1 staff member is employed as a cook to prepare hot meals on a daily basis. The registered provider was present on the day of inspection but does not work 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 and safety. The inspections 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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, 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 is the designated person in charge of the service and the deputy manager was appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The person named to deputise in the absence of the manager and deputy manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced at 9.30am on the morning of the inspection. The deputy manager and the registered provider arrived on the premises shortly thereafter. The registered provider remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection and the deputy manager was on the premises for part of the inspection. The service manager was also on the premises for part of the inspection although they were scheduled to be on leave.

On the day of inspection, 13 staff files for those employed in the early years service, including the manager and deputy manager, were reviewed. In addition, the registered provider's file was also reviewed.

(2)(a)(b) There were 28 written and validated references available in respect of the 14 adults whose files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider and the 13 staff employed to work in the early years service.

(d) International police vetting was available for 2 staff members who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as adults.

(4) Ten staff members whose files were reviewed and who work directly with children in the service each held appropriate childcare qualifications on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed to be equivalent by the Minister of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). The service manager, deputy manager and the registered provider also held appropriate childcare qualifications.

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 early years service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:

- In the Bunny room there were 7 children aged 3 years to 4 years 7 months being cared for by 2 staff members. One of these staff members was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio in this care room in a post funded by the Access and Inclusion Model scheme. In the afternoon, 2 children from this care room who were attending on a part-time or full day care basis were cared for in the Squirrels room.
- In the Panda room there were 8 children (of whom 5 children were aged 2 years 4 months to 2 years 11 months, and 3 children who were aged 3 years to 3 years 2 months) being cared for by 3 staff members.. One of these staff members was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio in this care room in a post funded by the Access and Inclusion Model scheme. In the afternoon, 5 children from this care room who were attending on a part-time or full day care basis were cared for in the Squirrels room.
- In the Squirrels room there were 15 children aged 3 years 6 months to 4 years 6 months being cared for by 3 staff members when the ECCE programme was in operation. In the afternoon, 7 of these children were present, in addition to 7 children from the Bunny room and the Panda room, with 1 staff member from the Squirrels room and 1 staff member from the Panda room.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present in the service at all times. This was confirmed by the staff roster.

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 on how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

Basic needs:

- The inspectors observed the children in all rooms to be engaged in interesting activities that were planned based on their interests or which the children had chosen themselves. Staff paid close attention to children's emerging interests or needs and kept note of such information on planning walls to consider when planning the weekly curriculum of activities.
- The service provides breakfast to the children if required. Parents provide children with their morning snacks, with the service providing a hot lunch and afternoon tea. Staff members also mentioned that food is always available to children if they are hungry before a scheduled mealtime. Children's dietary requirements are also catered for, as observed in dietary care plans on display in each room. Drinking water was also freely available and accessible to the children throughout the day. Mealtimes were observed to be a relaxed and social occasion, with rolling snack time in place in the Squirrels room where children can choose when to take a break from activities and eat their snacks at a designated table.
- Each care room had space where children could rest during the day, with sleep mats and bed linens available for children who wanted to nap. No children were observed to be sleeping on the day of the inspection.

- Nappy changing occurred regularly for those who required changing. Other children were supported to use the toilet independently with staff providing supervision when needed and ensuring children washed their hands following the use of the toilet.
- The service implements individual care plans where needed in partnership with parents and relevant professionals. The inspectors observed developmental, medical and dietary care plans that were up-to-date and available in relevant rooms. Following discussion with staff members, it was evident that staff were familiar with these plans and used the information available to them in the best interest of the child.
- All children in the service engaged in gross motor activities either outdoors or climbing, sliding, swinging and rolling on the 'play frames' inside the play centre on the day of inspection. The children were observed being asked to hold onto the grab handles of a safety walking rope that they refer to as "the rainbow rope" with a staff member leading the group and a staff member to the rear, to safely facilitate the children to access the outdoor play area which is located in a corner section of the car park, under the supervision of staff members. En route, the staff members and children sang a train-themed song to effectively support the transition.

Supporting relationships:

- The inspectors observed the children to be familiar and comfortable with the staff. Children called staff by name, looked to them for guidance and support and made requests for activities or resources that were promptly responded to. The children's emerging interests were noted on planning walls and materials were provided that staff thought they would like or needed. The children's work was displayed on the walls, as was photographs of children at play and on birthday walls. In the Squirrels room, there was a 'family album' where children could look at photographs of their families. This practice supports children's wellbeing by creating an environment where they feel a sense of identity, belonging and connectedness.
- The staff members in the Panda room were observed using appropriate oral vocabulary, warm and responsive facial expressions and signalling when interacting with children individually and in groups, to facilitate each child's inclusion and involvement in a caring and balanced way. In return, the children were given time and encouragement to communicate with the staff members both verbally and non-verbally. The service was soon due to commence a language promotion programme in conjunction with a HSE speech and language therapist, initially to be delivered in the Panda room, to enhance the children's communication skills.

- A mobile app is used to communicate children’s routines, care needs and activities to parents and guardians. Staff described how they use this app to keep parents updated on important communication, inputting general comments about the week’s plans and individual comments about children’s recent experiences. It was also evident through conversation, observations and care plans that staff are working with parents when they identify a child may need additional resources to meaningfully engage in their preschool routine.
- Staff appeared to work well as a team as they communicated with one another throughout the day regarding children’s care needs, the routine or materials needed. The person in charge used a whiteboard in the reception area to communicate daily staffing arrangements and children’s attendance to all staff on a daily basis.

Physical and material environment:

- A variety of play materials and resources were available in all care rooms. Materials were accessible on low-level shelving to facilitate children’s independent choice and play. The staff are also making an effort to incorporate more natural, open-ended materials to their rooms which was evident on the day as natural materials were available indoors and outdoors.
- Each care room had designated areas of interest including library/cosy corners, home corners, construction areas and art areas. Sensory play experiences were facilitated indoors with sensory trays provided in care rooms and also in the outdoor play areas.
- The Sensory room was used throughout the morning of the inspection to facilitate small group time in the Squirrels room and so that staff could carry out specific learning activities with children as part of their care plan.
- The outdoor play area was located in a fully enclosed fenced-off corner section of the car park adjoining the premises. This area was mainly covered with artificial grass, with surrounding paved pathways and a defined digging patch covered with soil. A plastic playhouse, rocking toys, ride-on toys, dolls and buggies, pipes, logs, tyres, balls and lengths of timber used to make balance beams were amongst the play equipment provided outdoors. A mud kitchen with real-life pots, pans and a kettle were also provided beneath a small covered lean-to canopy which provided shelter from sun and rain. Chairs and tables were provided for the children. A locked storage shed was used to store additional outdoor play equipment. An outdoor plumbed toilet with a wash hand basin supplied with thermostatically controlled warm water was provided which prevented the children from having to return indoors when they needed to use the toilet.

An adjoining but separate fully enclosed outdoor area with mature trees was provided which is awaiting development and currently not accessible to the preschool children.

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:

- External doors to the service were appropriately secured to restrict unauthorised access to the children and prevent children from exiting the premises unsupervised. The locked entrance door was fitted with a doorbell to alert staff to a visitor. On arrival to the service, the inspectors were allowed entrance by a designated person in charge and were requested to sign in on a visitor attendance record.
- Where necessary, internal doors were also appropriately secured. The door to the play centre and door to the rooms on the first floor were secured and could be entered following the entry of a door code available to staff.
- Emergency exits were unobstructed.
- The staircase was in good condition, had suitable handrails and was adequately lit to reduce the risk of falls or injury.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely and out of reach of children.
- A child in the Panda room was provided with whole grapes from home for their morning snack. When observed in the child's lunch box, a staff member immediately explained to the child that she would take the grapes to the kitchen to be into smaller pieces. This reduced the risk of choking for the child.

Infection Control:

- Food that was brought to the service from home was stored appropriately in fridges until consumed.
- Thermostatically controlled running water, liquid soap and paper towels were available at handwash basins indoors and outdoors.
- Disposable aprons and gloves were available in children's sanitary accommodations in the event a child required nappy changing.

- Handwashing was carried out at the appropriate times by children and adults, for example, before mealtimes, following use of the toilet, following messy play and after attending to children's personal care needs.
- With exception to the non-compliance below, the play equipment, materials and furniture were in a clean and hygienic condition.

Administration of Medication:

- Medication was stored out of the reach of children. No children were observed having medication administered to them on the day of inspection.
- Children who required long-term medical care or supervision had individual care plans detailing sign and symptoms of the condition and procedures to provide care in the event of an emergency, for example, administration of medication or application of first aid.

Fire Safety:

- The service has appropriate firefighting equipment in place such as mains-powered smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and fire blankets which were serviced at assigned intervals by a suitably experienced person.
- The fire assembly point was clearly marked.
- Fire escape routes were planned specifically for each care room with illustrations and evacuation procedures on prominent display in each area.
- Staff members reported and written records indicated that fire drills were practiced on a monthly basis to familiarise both adults and children of the correct procedures to follow in the event of a fire.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. A pedal operated bin was not in use in the first-floor sanitary accommodation or in the Squirrels room. The bin provided increased the risk of cross contamination due to the numerous touch points required to dispose of a soiled nappy. The waste bin in the Squirrels room had a broken pedal operated lid which was open, increasing the risk of contaminating the hands of those using the bin.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

The registered provider stated that new bins had been provided.

Summary Comment

The Inspectorate has accepted the assurances of the registered provider that appropriate measures have been taken to address the non-compliance found on inspection. The registered providers must ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to ensure that the service is maintained in a suitable condition. This regulation will be assessed at the next inspection.

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 who held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service. This was evidenced in the FAR training records maintained for 3 early years staff members and in the service's staff roster.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes available in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations available to children at all times.