

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015GY006
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Name of Service:	Acorn Pre-School
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Address of Service:	37 Dun Na Mara Drive, Renmore, Co. Galway
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Eircode:	H91 V2KR
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Name of Registered Provider:	Helen Hanley
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/02/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	7	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulation Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park Hospital, Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Friel
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

Acorn Pre-school is a private sessional service in operation since 2000 providing care and education to children aged from 3 years to 6 years old. It operates from 08:45 to 11:45 in the morning, Monday to Friday, school term time only. An afternoon session is registered from 12 noon until 15:00 although this is currently not in operation. The service operates from a ground floor care room in the registered provider's home located on a residential estate in Renmore, a suburb on the east side of Galway city.

Staffing

The registered provider operates the sessional service single handedly. There are two adults available nearby in the event of an emergency.

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 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 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 and two adults were available nearby in the event of an emergency.
- (b) The designated person was present in the service while the pre-school children were in attendance throughout the morning.
- (2) Staff files of the designated person and two emergency contacts were reviewed.
- (a) Five of the six required validated references were from past employers.
- (b) The remaining validated reference was from a source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all of the adults demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Three overseas police vetting disclosures were available for three adults who had resided outside the State for a period of six consecutive months or longer as adults.
- (4) There was evidence that the adult working directly with the children had attained a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 9 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 were reviewed and were found to contain the necessary information.

1. Complaints
2. Administration of Medication
3. Behaviour Management

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) The registered provider ensured that there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children throughout the morning session.
- (3) The adult child ratio was met. There were seven children in attendance with one adult.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:*
- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
 - (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
 - (c) details of the adult: child ratios in the service;*
 - (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
 - (e) the facilities available;*
 - (f) the opening hours and fees;*
 - (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
 - (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
 - (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
 - (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*

(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The name, position, qualifications and experience of the registered provider and two emergency relief adults were observed to be kept in the staff recruitment files in the service.
- (b) Details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide were available on the Tusla Registration Certificate displayed in the care room and in the information sent to parents/guardians at the beginning of term.
- (c) The details of the adult child ratios were available from information sent to parents at the beginning of term.
- (d) (e) (f) The type of care programme was detailed in the Parent Information along with the facilities available, opening hours and fees.
- (g) The services policies and procedures, required for Regulation 10, were kept in a folder in the service.
- (h) The attendance records for each child were available from service sign in/sign out records which indicated that no child had been signed in before the opening hours or signed out after the service's closing time.
- (i) Documentation was available to record the sign in/sign out details of the registered provider on a daily basis.
- (j) A template was available for use for the administration of medication. However, the registered provider stated none had been administered since the beginning of term.
- (k) A template was available for use for accident/Incident forms. However, the registered provider stated none had been completed since the beginning of term.
- (3) The above records were available in the service when requested by the inspector.

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)

Basic Needs:

- Snacks, which were provided by parents/guardians and stored in the fridge in the care room, were observed being eaten at 10:00 in the partially covered outdoor area. They were observed to be healthy and nutritious. Examples included, berried fruits, crackers, bite sized vegetables, crackers and filled sandwiches.
- Each child had access to their own individually labelled water bottle throughout the morning. These were stored on accessible, tiered, shelving which the children could easily reach.
- The sanitary area was fitted with thermostatically controlled hot water, 37.5°C, paper towels, dispensing soap and a pedal operated bin was in use for the disposal of paper waste. Training seats and step-ups were available promoting and encouraging independence with toileting skills.
- The children were observed throughout the morning accessing the toilet area independently and handwashing was observed before eating and after toileting. An adult was nearby to provide assistance, if required.
- A quiet area fitted with a child sized sofa and two comfortable chairs was available for children who wished to sit quietly away from noisy activities.
- The weather on the day was cold, damp and wet and the children were noted to be dressed appropriately with waterproof jackets, leggings, wellingtons and hats.
- The inspector observed that each child had individually labelled spare clothing which they changed into when coming in from playing with the water outdoors.
- Reminders were heard being given to the children during the morning so that the children could anticipate and prepare themselves for transitions.
- The adult in the service promoted the awareness of healthy habits in the children. An example included the use of clean tissues when required.

- The adult working directly with the children was observed engaging positively with them throughout the morning. During tabletop activities and outdoor play, they were heard praising children’s efforts and giving encouragement in relation to each child’s chosen activity.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that there were suitable furniture, equipment and materials available for children to play both indoors and outdoors. The indoor and outdoor areas were laid out in clearly defined areas with age and stage appropriate toys and equipment which provided opportunities to enhance the learning outcomes of the children across all developmental areas.

- Cognitive development – a variety of Montessori equipment which included dressing racks, knobbed cylinders, wooden geometric panels, sand numbers and a range of play based materials including building blocks were readily accessible from shelving positioned at the children’s level.
- Language development was supported through one to one and group discussions at circle time with each child giving an account of their news, songs including a welcome song which included all of the children’s names and a sticking farm activity which provided the names of each farm animal. In addition, a variety of age and stage appropriate books were available from the library area located near the rest area.
- Imaginary play activities were available- various materials and resources including dressing up clothes, a wooden kitchen, dinosaurs, a theatre and puppets, a tool bench and toolbox.
- Sensory development – sand and water were available in the outdoor area. The children were able to access the water tap and fill their pots using the water in the mud kitchen transporting the water to and from the area and in the water wheel.
- Creative development was facilitated in the outdoor area with access to paint, chalk, natural materials and a mud kitchen with resources. The children were observed transporting water to and from the area.
- Gross motor skills of cycling, balancing, climbing and running were enhanced with equipment including slides, rockers, tricycles, cars, scooters and wheelbarrows for pushing and pulling which were observed in use during the morning.
- Wooden tables and chairs were available which were suitable for the age and stage of the children attending the service in both the indoor and outdoor areas.

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 certificate was available to evidence that registered provider had First Aid Responder (FAR) training completed. The roster indicated that the adult was available while the early years children were present in the service.
- (2) (a)(b) The suitably equipped first aid box was stored within easy reach of the adult; it was located in a on a high shelf near the sanitary room and was observed to be available throughout the inspection process.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (c) an authorised person.
- (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) Written records were available of the monthly fire drills which took place in the service. The date recorded of the most recent fire drill was 16 January 2026, with previous dates including 15 December 2025 and 14 November 2025.
- (b) Written records were available detailing number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service and the smoke alarms. The firefighting equipment certificate was dated January 2026 and the smoke

alarm certificate was recorded as 04 February 2026.

- (2)
- (c) The fire drills, firefighting equipment certificate and the smoke alarm certificates were open to review on the day of inspection.
- (4) The notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of evacuation was located on the wall of the care room beside the main entrance.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

Documentation was available which evidenced that the registered provider had insurance for the number of children attending the service and the type of service registered.