

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier: TU2015GY115

Name of Service: Sonas Early Learning Centre

Address of Service: 61 Tirellan Heights, Headford Road, Galway, Co. Galway

Eircode: H91 C977

Name of Registered Provider: Theresa Murphy

Service type: Full Day, Part Time, Sessional

Date of Inspection: 24/09/2025

No of pre-school children:	AM	52	PM	52

Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla – Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulations Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Co. Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Meehan and E. Friel.
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

This privately owned, purpose-built premises is in a housing development in an urban area of Galway city on the Headford road, called Tirellan. The service operating hours are 07.45 to 18.00, from Monday to Friday and the age range of children is 1 to 6 years. The service caters for full day-care, part-time care, Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE) and sessional pre-school care programmes from 09.00 to 12.00.

This two-storey premises has a total of 5 playrooms, the Daisy room (1-2 years), the Sweet Peas room (2-3 years), Sun Flowers (2-3 years), the Poppy room - ECCE (3-4 years) and the Buttercups (3-4 years). The service has 1 designated sleep room which is located on the ground floor for children aged 1 to 2 years of age. The service has a designated kitchen. Children have access to artificial grass outdoor area with various interest areas at the front and side of the service.

Staffing

There is a total of 17 adults working in the service which includes the general manager, manager, cook, 2 school aged adults. The registered provider is not on the premises daily. There was documentary evidence that adults have on-going training and education.

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.

Additional Information

This inspection was triggered by information received by the Early Years Inspectorate.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the general 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.

(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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

- (1)
- (a) The registered provider ensured that the service had a designated person in charge and named persons were available to deputise as required.
 - (b) The general manager and manager were observed on the premises while the early years children were present in the service. The roster indicated that named persons were available while the early years children were present in the service.
- (2) Recruitment files for all 17 adults were reviewed:
- (a) Twenty-four of 34 required written and validated references were from past employers.

- (b) The remaining 10 required written and validated references were from sources other than past a employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all 17 adults for whom they were required, demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every 3 years.
- (d) Overseas police vetting was available for 11 of 13 adults for whom it was required, who had lived outside of Ireland for more than 6 months as an adult.
- (4) All 13 adults working directly with the children held Early Childhood Care and Education qualifications ranging at Level 5 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The 2 school age adults, the chef and registered provider did not require a childcare qualification.
- (7)(a) Evidence was available that 16 of 16 adults had received induction training which included all policies of the service, each staff members role in the service, the governance structure, grievance and disciplinary procedures, code of behaviour and mandatory training required. A staff handbook was available.

Documented evidence was available for these staff that they had signed and received training in the following policies:

- Complaints policy.
- Accident & Incident policy.
- Risk Assessment & Management policy.

Non-Compliance Information

- (2)
- (d) There were no overseas police vetting certificates on file for 2 adults for whom it was required, posing a safety risk the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider responded to say:

Corrective and Preventive Action

One staff member finished with the company and was not rostered following the inspection. The second certificate was obtained for the remaining staff member. A new recruitment process has been put in place to prevent this happening in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the required translated police vetting was submitted and documented evidence that the other staff member is removed from the roster.

Summary Comment

The documentation submitted has been reviewed by the Early Years Inspectors and has been deemed to have met the requirements of this part of the Regulations.

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 in Schedule 5 were reviewed and met the necessary requirements:

- Complaints.
- Induction and Recruitment.
- Risk Assessment & Management.
- Accident and Incident.

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) An adequate number of adults were working with the children on the day of inspection and was reflected on the roster.
- (2) The registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children was adhered to. There were 11 adults working directly with 52 children on the day of inspection.
- (8)(a) Documentary evidence on the roster indicated that at least 2 adults were on the premises when the pre-school was operating.

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:

- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

16 (1)(h) Documented evidence was available of children’s attendance in the service. Children were signed in and out of the service via a childcare multimedia application.

- (i) The staff roster was reviewed for the week of the 15th of September to the 19th of September. The information on the rostered outlined the staff on duty directly working with children, cook and those staff rostered off. It also detailed the person in charge, deputy, relief and cover staff.
- (k) Accidents, injuries or incidents records were issued to parents on the service’s electronic application system. There was an incident on the 16th of September 2025 which contained all the relevant details.

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.*

Compliance Information

19(1)(a)

- Each child was given enough time to eat and enjoy their snacks and meals without being rushed. The atmosphere during mealtimes was relaxed, with pleasant social interaction among the children and staff.
- The crockery, cutlery and drinking utensils used were suitable for the children’s ages and stage of development.
- The staff responded to children’s individual personalities, sensitivities and needs in relation to nappy changing, toileting and toilet training.

- The older children had access to the sanitary area when required. Children were allowed to take their time during toileting. Staff encouraged and supported children to become more independent in toileting practices.
- Children were encouraged and supported to manage their own personal care appropriate to their own level of independence and to develop self-help and personal hygiene skills for example washing their hands and at toileting.
- The staff listened to children in a caring way when they expressed emotions and reassured them that it is normal to experience positive and negative emotions at times.
- Staff responded to the younger children in a timely and appropriate way when they were crying or when becoming upset.
- Children had the opportunity to relax and rest in the cosy corner in the playrooms throughout the day.
- Younger children were put down to sleep in the designated sleep room as required throughout the day.
- Children were observed in the outdoor area at various times during the day.

Programme of Activities

- Curriculum planning was in place to support each child's age and stage of development.
- Children's language development was encouraged; they were observed reading books, engaged with adults at circle time to discuss the books and chatting to their friends.
- Through the programme of activities children had the opportunity to interact in small and large groups and were encouraged by adults to take the lead and engage with their peers.
- Adults created an environment for easy transitions throughout the session. All transitions during the session involved the children, they took an active role in preparing, assisting the adults, taking the lead at snack time and tidying up. This in turn promoted each child's independence and leadership skills.
- The service had a programme of activities which supported the individual needs of each child in line with their age and stage of development which was linked to the curriculum.
- The activities were observed were both adult and children led both indoors and outdoors with an emphasis of the children's emerging interests, wellbeing and development.

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:

- There was a buzzer access system into the main entrance front door.
- The staff only areas, kitchen, staff sanitary area and storage areas were secured and thereby inaccessible to a pre-school child. A staff fob was used to open these areas.
- The external outdoor play area was secured so that children could not leave the area unsupervised and unauthorised persons could not enter the area.
- Fire doors throughout the building were unobstructed.
- All cleaning agents were stored inaccessible to the children.
- The playroom temperatures were thermostatically controlled, to ensure the temperatures were maintained between 18°C to 22°C.
- Heavy equipment and furnishings were anchored appropriately.
- All toys and play equipment were observed to be safe and in good condition.
- There was a documented risk assessment system for the indoor and outdoor play areas, for checking that toys and equipment were not broken, play areas were maintained in a clean condition and in a good state of repair.
- There were no pits or ponds in the outdoor area to cause any hazard or potential risk to the pre-school child.

Infection Control:

- Hand washing facilities were provided with a supply of warm water, liquid hand soap and disposable paper hand towels.
- During the inspection, the children were assisted and encouraged to wash their hands prior to eating, after nappy changing, after toileting, after using a tissue and after playing outdoors.
- There were 2 designated nappy changing areas with designated wash hand basins. The children in nappies were changed in a timely manner and on a regular basis. Staff involved in nappy changing wore a disposable apron and gloves. There were foot pedalled, airtight sealable bins for the disposal of nappies.

- There was a steam steriliser available for cleaning children’s soothers. These were stored in individual containers which were labelled.
- The toys and play equipment were maintained in a clean and hygienic condition.
- The playrooms were observed to be kept adequately ventilated with the windows and doors left open whilst maintaining the room temperatures at the required levels.
- The service had cleaning records for the materials, equipment and furnishings.

Administration of Medication:

- Medication was secured in the service office and was clearly labelled with the name of the child and the expiry date of the medication.

Safe Sleep:

- Children were observed to be put down to sleep by staff as required following cues and signs of tiredness. Throughout the day infants and toddlers were observed sleeping in cots in the designated sleep room. After the main meal of the day children were observed sleeping on stackable beds and sleep beds suitable for children aged 12 to 24 months. The inspectors observed that staff stayed in the rooms and in the designated sleep room, supervising the sleeping children.
- There was a safe sleep policy that detailed temperature, lighting, ventilation, space between cots and child safety requirements, as per best practice guidelines for age and stage of development of each child.
- Sleep records were kept for each child’s sleep, recording the time an adult physically checked the child every 10 minutes and their signature. Additionally, the records included a sleeping child’s colour, position, breathing and the temperature of the sleep room, with the opportunity to document any necessary remedial actions to be taken.
- All linen provided was clean, dry and stored in labelled containers.
- Rest and quiet areas were provided in each of the playrooms to facilitate a child to rest or opt out of an activity if they wish to do so.

Fire Safety:

- A record of monthly fire drill was documented and available for inspection.

Outing:

- The general manager stated that “the service does not conduct outings”.

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) Two adults working in the pre-school service had evidence of a current first aid responder qualification and rostered on the day while the children were present.
- (2)(a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and in an easily accessible conspicuous position.
- (b) The first aid box was readily available, with the content items within date.

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) Arrangements were in place to record monthly fire drills. The last documented fire drill was dated 25th of August 2025.
- (b) A record of the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment in the service was on file. Records indicated that the last annual maintenance for the firefighting equipment was dated 10th of July 2025. Records indicated that the last maintenance documentation for the fire detection system was dated the 10th of July 2025.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in each playroom and main corridor.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

During the inspection the manager and staff ensured that the preschool children were adequately supervised in the indoor and outdoor environments.

In conversation, staff in each playroom stated they had received training in the policies of the service. They were aware of their roles and responsibilities in relation to supervising children during the operation of the service.

The adult child ratio was maintained in each playroom and in the outdoor play area. This was evidenced by the staff roster and observations by the inspectors on the day.

The staff ensured that children were supervised during sleep, mealtimes, in the playrooms, in the outdoor play area, while children used the sanitary areas and during nappy changing. The layout of the facility allowed staff to supervise children by sound and by sight.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had insurance with an expiry date of the 27th of March 2026, which was for a full day care service for 68 pre-school children including the following: -

- public liability insurance,
- insurance against fire and theft,
- buildings insurance.

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.
- (3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall-
- (a) include the nature of the complaint and the manner in which the complaint was dealt with, and
 - (b) be open to inspection on the premises by an authorised person.
- (4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2)(a) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the complaint has been dealt with.

Compliance Information

(1)(a), (b), (c)

The service when asked stated they had 1 recent complaint.

The service had a complaints policy outlining the process and procedure for:

- How to make a complaint, who the named person in the service is that deals with complaints and that they are treated in a confidential manner.
- The implementation of the complaint's procedure and how the service deals with complaints.
- The manner through which a complaint is dealt with and the procedures in which a complainant is kept up to date in relation to the complaint.
- The policy outlines the different steps in the complaint's process and the right of appeal.

(3)(a)(b) The policy outlined how the complaint is dealt with and that it is open for inspection by an authorised officer.

(4) The service policy detailed that a record is maintained for 2 years from the date on which the complaint was made.