

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015GY199
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	The Willows Outdoor Preschool
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	Newtown, Abbeyknockmoy, Tuam, Co. Galway
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<b>Eircode:</b>	H54 TD50
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Sharon Skehill
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Sessional
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<b>Date of Inspection:</b>	27/11/2025
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	51	PM	31
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulation Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park Hospital, Galway.
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	E. Friel and S. Meehan.
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not applicable
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### Description of service

This private, outdoor, service operates from a renovated former primary school, in a rural location called Newtown, near the village of Abbeyknockmoy, Co Galway. It provides full day and sessional care from 08:00 to 17:30, operating 50 weeks of the year. The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school care and sessional programme is facilitated with two sessions operating from 09:00 to 12 noon and 09:15 to 12:15, Monday to Friday, school term time only. A school age care service operates in the morning from 08:00 until 09:00 and in the afternoon from 13:45 to 17:30.

The service accommodates children aged 2 to 6 years. Three care rooms are available in the indoor area for use by the children namely Blossom, Sycamore and Oak and the outdoor shelters include the outdoor classroom, Garden room and the Barn room in use as a communal area for all children. There is a kitchen located indoors where snacks and hot meals are prepared. Secure outdoor play areas are available to the back, front and side of the premises.

### Staffing

The registered provider is the named person in charge and there is a named designated deputy. There are a total of 21 adults working on the premises which includes the registered provider, deputy manager, 8 early years educators of which 1 is a relief staff member from a sister service, an administrator, cook and 4 students. Four adults work with school aged children. The adults working directly with the children held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education between a Level 5 and a level 10 on the National Qualifications Framework.

### 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 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
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(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 ensured that there was a designated person in charge and a named person available to deputise.
- (b) The staff roster indicated that both the designated person in charge and deputy was on the premises while the pre-school children were present.
- (c) A management structure was available in the service and staff were aware of their roles and responsibilities.
- (2) All 21 adult recruitment files were reviewed:
- (a) There were 33 of the required 42 written and validated references from previous employers.
  - (b) There were 9 validated references of the required 42 from sources other than past employers.
  - (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available in respect of the 21 adults demonstrating compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew garda vetting every 3 years.

- (d) International police vetting was available for 3 adults working in the service who had lived in another state for a period longer than 6 months and these were available for inspection.
- (4) There was evidence that 12 adults who required a childcare qualification had attained at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 to 10 on the National Framework of qualifications or a qualification deemed to be equivalent.

### 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.*

#### Compliance Information

- (1) Documentary evidence in the form of attendance records and staff rosters indicated that an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children.
- (2) At all times during the period of the inspection, the registered provider ensured that an adequate number of adults were working directly with the children. There were 8 adults and 2 students working directly and caring for 51 pre-school children in the morning and with 31 children in the afternoon.

### 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:*
- (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)

- (i) Staff rosters dated 7 October 2025 and 27 November 2025 were reviewed. Both were found to include the staff on duty, relief staff, start/finish times and breaks.

(k) A sample of 15 accident/incident/injury reports were reviewed from the period 03 September 2025 to 26 November 2025 which were noted to include all the relevant information required under this part of the Regulation 16 (1).

### 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

Basic needs:

- The service promoted healthy eating. Food and snacks were provided at regular intervals with the service providing the main food requirements of the day. Staff stated there were no children with allergies and alternative food was available in the event a child did not like the food on the menu on the day.
- Staff stated breakfast of oat and wheat-based cereals along with toast was available at breakfast served between 08:00 and 09:00.
- A rolling mid-morning snack, available from 10:30, consisted of brown bread, rice cakes, ham, cheese and bite sized pieces of fruit. Children were given time to eat without being rushed.
- Lunch served at 13:45 in the Blossom care room was noted to consist of pasta, ham, broccoli and cucumber with orange segments served after lunch. Requests for more food were facilitated with children encouraged to help themselves, assisted by the adults. Afternoon snack in the Oak room was available from 14:50 and included cheese wraps. Water and additional pieces of fruit were readily available.
- Children were provided with appropriate cutlery and crockery suitable for their age and stage of development including plates and glasses at mealtimes.
- All children were observed at outdoor play throughout the day. The natural environment, materials and resources provided ideal conditions for free play, adventure, risk taking and challenge. Children were noted to be dressed appropriately in the outdoor play areas with waterproof trousers, hats, gloves and coats as it was raining and cold.
- Each care room had a cosy rest area where children were observed relaxing after lunch. Each area was fitted with soft furnishings some of which included sofas with scattered cushions. Books were available in each area for the children to read while sitting/resting and a staff member was observed reading the

children a story in the Sycamore care room. In addition, 6 stackable beds, with individual bed linen, were stored in the office if a child wished to have a rest/sleep during the day.

- Children were observed to be encouraged and supported by staff in the sanitary areas to manage their personal care appropriate to their level of independence and to develop self-help and personal hygiene skills. Examples included children changing from wet clothing into their spare clothing by themselves with staff available in the area to assist if required. In discussion, staff stated that there were no children in nappies. Steps up to the toilets were available to aid child to toilet independently.
- Staff communication with the children was noted to be positive, encouraging, respectful and caring. Examples included staff getting down to the children's level and leaning in to listen to children in the outdoor Garden who were finding turn taking and sharing of equipment difficult.

### 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 service provided evidence that a person trained in first aid responder for children was available to the children attending the pre-school service. Four adults had current training in first aid response for children.
- (2)
- (a) The first aid boxes were stored in each area in easily accessible and conspicuous positions in the service.
- (b) The service demonstrated that the first aid box was fully equipped with all contents within expiry dates and available while the children were attending the pre-school service.

## 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

The adult child ratio was maintained in each care room and in the outdoor play areas. This was evidenced by the staff roster and observations on the day.

Staff ensured that children were supervised throughout the day by:

- Sitting with the children at mealtimes and while carrying out activities.
- Identifying areas which required additional supervision with staff stating these were called sentry points. Examples included slides, swings, monkey bars, rope ladders and walking planks.
- Accompanying children walking to and from the sanitary areas in the indoor and outdoor play areas.

The open layout of structures in the outdoor play areas and the positioning of the furniture in the indoor care rooms allowed staff to easily supervise children by sound and sight.