

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KE052		
Name of Service:	Apple Tree Creche		
Address of Service:	Ballycane House, Craddockstown, Naas, Co. Kildare		
Eircode:	W91 P840		
Name of Registered Provider:	Sharon Brannigan		
Service type:	Sessional		
Date(s) of Inspection:	08/11/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	60	PM n/a
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla Child and Family Agency, Suite 7, Vista Primary Care, Ballymore Eustace Road, Naas, Co. Kildare, W91 X38W		
Inspection undertaken by:	E. Mulhern		
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.		

Description of service

Apple Tree Creche is a private early years service registered to accommodate children aged 2-6 years. The service operates from a single-story building in a housing estate in Naas town. Children are allocated to one of four rooms according to their age and stage of development. An outdoor play area is provided at the side of the building. The service offers a play-based service and participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The service operates 38 weeks per year and currently opens between 9am and 12:30pm.

Staffing

There are 12 staff members employed to work in the service including the registered provider. Ten staff members were present on the day of inspection; nine worked directly with the children and one managed the service, helping within the rooms as needed.

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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 19(1)(a) – health, welfare and development of child and regulation 23 – safety (infection control). As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Red Room and the Green Room.

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 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 service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise in their absence.
 - (b) The person in charge was on the premises throughout the inspection.
 - (c) There was a documented management structure in place including roles and responsibilities of staff. The staff members demonstrated an awareness of their roles and the lines of authority and accountability within the service.

- (2)
- (a) & (b) Documents were available demonstrating appropriate consideration of references. A minimum of two references were available for each staff member. These were provided from past employers and from another source where they had only one or no previous employers. Records were available of verification checks carried out.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all adults. These had been renewed in accordance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, which requires services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) International police vetting had been sourced for one adult whom this was required.
- (4) All adults held either a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed to be equivalent by the Minister.

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) An adequate number of adults were working directly with the children throughout the inspection. There were 9 staff members allocated to work directly with 60 children. A 10th adult was available to assist as needed.
- (3) The minimum adult to child ratio requirement was maintained in accordance with the ages and type of service delivered.

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 children's basic needs were met. Within the preschool rooms, the children were free to move around, taking a break mid-session for lunch. They brought healthy food from home in line with the service's healthy eating policy. During mealtime, they sat in groups, with an adult at each table fostering conversation and encouraging positive social interactions. This created a warm environment where children engaged with both adults and their peers. They had access to drinks throughout the session. They managed toilet use on their own with staff nearby to offer help if needed. Clear routines were in place for handwashing after toilet use and before eating. The children independently put on coats suitable for the weather before going outside to play.

Supporting Relationships around Children

The adults fostered positive relationships with children, providing support through responsive interactions, gentle guidance, and active listening. They promoted teamwork during activities and helped children resolve conflicts in a respectful and kind manner. Group activities, such as shared meals and cooperative play, were designed to foster social connections, helping children develop friendships and essential communication skills. The staff described connections with families, offering support through phone calls and meetings to support children's emotional and social wellbeing. An app was used to communicate with parents/guardians in real time and provide information relating to the service including updates and daily activities.

Physical and Material Environment

The environments were arranged to inspire exploration, independence and creativity. Areas of interest, such as home corners and transport areas were clearly defined, encouraging children to engage in imaginative and creative play. Open shelving displayed a range of equipment including mark-making materials and fine motor tools such as building blocks and puzzles, all within easy reach. This setup promoted independent decision-making and allowed children to lead their own learning experiences. Designated rest areas with soft seating and books were available, providing children with a space to relax or take a break from more active play.

Each room had an allocated time to use the outdoor area. The space had been designed to support children's physical development and creativity and included climbing equipment, balls, and ride-on toys. A sand area offered opportunities for sensory exploration and imaginative play. A sheltered space was provided so children could engage in outdoor activities in all weathers.

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:

Measures were in place to ensure the safety of the children. The entrances and exits were securely locked to prevent unauthorised access and to ensure children did not leave unsupervised. Cleaning products and cables were safely stored out of reach, and heavy furniture was secured to avoid the risk of tipping. Emergency exits were kept clear to allow for evacuation in case of a fire and staff demonstrated a clear understanding of fire evacuation procedures.

Infection Control:

Measures were in place to reduce the risk of infection. Staff actively encouraged children to wash their hands after using the toilet, after outdoor play and before meals. Tables were cleaned before mealtimes to ensure hygiene. The premises were clean and well-maintained, with waste disposed of in pedal-operated bins to allow

hands-free disposal. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of the exclusion criteria for children showing signs of contagious illnesses, in line with the service's infection control policy.

Administration of Medication:

No child received medicine on the day of inspection. The service had a medication administration policy and staff demonstrated an awareness of the procedures to take to give medicine safely if required. This included obtaining written parent/guardian consent. Template records were available for documenting any medications given.

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 staff members had recognised certificates in first aid training for children and were always present.

(2)

(a) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were stored in each room, in conspicuous positions easily accessible to staff.

(b) The first aid boxes were always available for use.

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) Records were available of fire drills carried out in the service. The most recent drill recorded was dated 30 September 2024.
 - (b) Records were available detailing the maintenance of the firefighting equipment dated 29 May 2024 and the smoke alarm system dated 26 January 2024.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were displayed in conspicuous positions in the preschool rooms.

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 children were appropriately supervised when indoors and outdoors primarily by staff keeping them within sight.