

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015KE096
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Name of Service:	Little Toppers
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Address of Service:	Ovidstown, Straffan, Co. Kildare
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Eircode:	W23 DX97
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Name of Registered Provider:	Josephine Kiernan
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	12/11/2024
	13/11/2024

No of pre-school children: 12/11/2024	AM	52	PM	37
No of pre-school children: 13/11/2024	AM	52	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 and S. Quigley
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

Little Toppers is a privately operated early years service located in a one-storey purpose-built premises in Ovidstown, Straffan, Kildare. The service offers sessional and full-day care to children aged 1-6 years, Monday to Friday between 7:30am and 6pm. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme, offering a sessional service to eligible children in the mornings, 38 weeks per year. A school-aged service is provided in the afternoon. Learning is facilitated through a play-based curriculum. Children are allocated to one of seven pre-school rooms according to their age and stage of development. An outdoor area is available at the sides and rear of the building and a parking area is provided in front.

Staffing

There are 16 staff members employed to work in the service including the registered provider, management staff, maintenance staff and a cook. Ten staff members and a student were working directly with the pre-school children on both days of the inspection. Two managers were available to help 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/ premises and facilities. 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 Children. As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Butterfly room (ages 2-4 years), Little Giraffe room (ages 1-2 years), Little Cubs room (ages 1-3 years) and Little Monkeys room (ages 2-3 years).

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, staff and children who were present on the days 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 had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise in their absence.
- (b) There was a designated person in charge and a named person who could deputise on the premises throughout the inspection.

(2)

- (a) & (b) A minimum of two references had been sourced from past employers or from another source where adults had only one or no previous employers. The references had a record of verification checks carried out.
- (c) Garda Vetting disclosures were available for all adults, 16 of which were dated within the last three years. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate

Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years in relation to 2 staff members. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.

(d) Police vetting disclosures were available for all adults for whom this was required.

(4) All staff members employed to work directly with pre-school children held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at a minimum Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed 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.

(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 directly with the children throughout the inspection. There were 10 staff members allocated to work directly with 52 children with two managers available to assist as needed.

(2) The minimum adult to child ratio requirement was maintained in accordance with the ages and type of service delivered.

(8)(a) There were at least two adults on the premises throughout the inspection. The staff roster provided for a minimum of two adults to be present at all times of opening.

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 well-supported. They had access to drinks of water within their rooms. Older children independently managed toilet visits, with staff close by to assist if needed. Younger children had their nappies changed at regular intervals and promptly when needed in between. Within the preschool rooms, children had the freedom to move around and took regular breaks for snacks and meals. Younger children were provided with bibs to protect their clothing from spills. Clear routines were established for handwashing after using the sanitary facilities, outdoor play and before meals. All children had an opportunity to play outdoors and wore coats appropriate to the cold weather. Younger children were provided with an opportunity to sleep in a quiet room after dinner. Staff reported that if children display signs of tiredness outside of this time they are facilitated to sleep accordingly.

Supporting Relationships around Children

The service fostered positive relationships with children by offering support through responsive interactions, gentle guidance, and attentive listening. Staff were observed responding appropriately to children's verbal and non-verbal cues, comforting children when they became upset. A key-worker system was in place to facilitate the development of secure attachments. Teamwork was encouraged during activities, and staff assisted children in resolving conflicts respectfully and kindly. Group activities, such as shared meals and cooperative play, were designed to strengthen social bonds, helping children build friendships and develop key communication skills. Staff discussed maintaining connections with families by providing support through phone calls and meetings to nurture children's emotional and social development. A service-parent communication app was used to keep parents and guardians informed about their child's daily activities in real-time and provide for two-way communication.

Physical and Material Environment

The rooms were laid out to support children’s learning, play and independence. Open shelving displayed a variety of resources, including mark-making supplies and fine motor tools including building blocks and puzzles. These were easily accessible to promote independent decision-making and self-directed learning. The equipment was appropriate to the age and stage of the children attending, including push and pull and cause and effect toys in the younger rooms. All children had access to the outdoor area which had sheltered areas for use in all weather. Here the children had access to equipment including ride-on toys, playhouses and construction areas designed to support physical development and play.

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 had been taken to ensure the safety of the children. All entry and exit points were secured to prevent children from leaving unattended or unauthorised individuals from gaining access. Equipment was properly maintained and potentially hazardous items such as cleaning products and medicines were safely stored out of children's reach. Staff showed a clear understanding of the measures to take in the event of a fire and were familiar with the emergency exit routes. Emergency exits were kept unobstructed to facilitate a timely evacuation.

Infection Control:

Measures were taken to minimise the risk of infection spreading. The premises were clean and well maintained with cleaning schedules in place. Children were supported to wash their hands after using the toilet, engaging in outdoor play and before meals. Soothers were kept in individual containers to avoid cross-contamination. Appropriate infection control measures were taken during nappy changing including the use of gloves, aprons, and thorough handwashing. Waste was managed using pedal-operated bins to ensure proper containment. Each child was provided with their own bed linens, which were laundered according to a comprehensive cleaning schedule. Staff were aware of guidelines on when children and staff should remain at home due to illness, such as fever, diarrhoea, vomiting, or contagious conditions.

Administration of Medication:

Medications were stored in their original packaging out of reach of children. Staff demonstrated a clear understanding of procedures to safeguard children if giving medicine. This included getting written consent from parents or guardians, having a second staff member present as a witness during administration and maintaining detailed records shared with parents or guardians upon collection.

Safe Sleep:

Measures were taken to safeguard children during sleep time. Children slept in cots or on low beds suitable for their age and developmental stage. A staff member always remained in the room when children were sleeping. They conducted regular checks on the children which were documented on an application system for sharing with parents.

Outing:

The staff and management reported that children are not taken on outings from the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

Garda vetting was available for all staff members. However, two staff member's vetting disclosures were not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

Management immediately applied for and received the Garda vetting for both staff members. A master sheet has been created of expiry dates to cover all vetting. This will be checked at the start of each month.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Copies of renewed Garda vetting for two staff members.

Summary Comment

The requirement has been met.

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) At all times staff members with recognised certificates in first aid training were available to the children.

(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 11 November 2024.

(b) Records were available detailing the maintenance of the firefighting equipment dated January 2024 and the smoke alarm system dated October 2024.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire were displayed in conspicuous positions throughout the premises.

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, primarily by sight. This included when they arrived at or left the service and transitioned between indoor and outdoor areas.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

Compliance Information

(c) The preschool rooms had an adequate source of natural light. This was supplemented with artificial lighting. The service had underfloor heating and air conditioning in all rooms. The ambient temperature of the rooms was recorded at 18°C. Windows could be opened to provide natural ventilation. Mechanical ventilation was available in the sanitary areas.