

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2015KK045 | | | |
| Name of Service: | Bluebells Early Years Service | | | |
| Address of Service: | Old Sion Road, Middle-Knock, Kilkenny, Co. Kilkenny | | | |
| Eircode: | R94 H323 | | | |
| Name of Registered Provider: | Lorraine Knowles | | | |
| Service type: | Full Day, Part Time, Sessional | | | |
| Date of Inspection: | 01/02/2024 | | | |
| No of pre-school children: | AM | 24 | PM | 24 |
| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Tusla Child & Family Agency, Athy Road, Carlow. | | | |
| Inspection undertaken by: | N. Thornton | | | |
| 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).

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| Conditions if applicable | Not applicable |
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Description of service

Bluebells Early Years Service is a full day care service located on the old Sion Road in Kilkenny city. The service offers full day, part-time and sessional childcare services for children aged 0 to 6 years. The service is open from 08:00 to 18:00 hours, Monday to Friday, 52 weeks of the year and operates from a residence which contains four designated classrooms, the baby room and toddler room classrooms on the ground floor, pre-school 1 and senior pre-school classrooms on the second floor, two sleep rooms on the ground floor, a designated kitchen and dining area, and an onsite outdoor play area at the back of the building.

Staffing

There were nine staff including the registered provider. Two students of Early Childhood Care and Education were also present on placement. All staff working directly with the children held at least a minimum qualification of Level 5 to Level 8 in Early Childhood Care and Education on the Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) 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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under the following regulations.

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

Regulation 19-Health, Welfare and Development of Child.

Regulation 22-Food and Drink.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included all four classrooms and the outdoor area.

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, 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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) There was a designated person in charge of the service, on the day of inspection. The designated person in charge remained onsite for the duration of the inspection.

(b) A second named person was available to deputise as required.

(c) A clear outline of the management structure in the service was available. In discussion with staff, the inspector was assured that each staff member was aware of their roles and responsibilities.

(2) Staff files for nine staff members employed in the service were available for inspection. Two files were also available for inspection for the two students on placement in the service.

(a)(b) Two validated references were available on file for each of the nine staff members employed in the service, from either a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting certificates were available on file for each staff member, who as part of their role in the service, worked directly with the children in the service or had contact with the children. Garda vetting certificates were also available for each of the two students on placement in the service.

(d) Police vetting was available for each of three staff members working directly with the children, who had lived outside of the state for a period longer than six months.

(3) On review of the staff files and in line with the service's recruitment policy, there was evidence to assure the inspector, that the procedures specified in paragraph (2) were carried out prior to any staff member commencing work directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(4) Certificates of qualifications were available in each staff member's file, demonstrating that each staff member held a qualification ranging from the minimum Level 5 to Level 8 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

On review of the service's written policies, procedures and statements that were available, the inspector observed that all policies, procedures and statements specified in schedule 5 were available and open for inspection. The content of the service's policies, procedures and statements were adequate in content and specific to the service.

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) Throughout the inspection, the inspector observed that there was always an adequate number of staff working directly with the children in attendance at the service. On the morning of inspection there were 24 pre-school children being supervised by 5 qualified staff members. The registered provider and an additional staff member were also available to help or relief for staff breaks when required.

(2) On the ground floor, in the Baby room there were two staff members directly caring for five children aged between 1 to 2 years.

In the Toddler room there was one staff member directly caring for one child aged between 2 to 3 years.

On the first floor, in pre-school 1 there were eight pre-school children aged 3 to 4 years directly cared for by one staff member and one student.

In senior pre-school, six pre-school children aged 4 to 6 years were directly supervised by one staff member and one student.

(8)(a) On review of the staff roster and on observation of staffing levels during the inspection, the registered provider ensured that there were always at least two qualified staff members on the premises.

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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b) The registered provider and staff in the service were observed to ensure that each classroom provided the children in attendance with a physical environment appropriate to the age of the children in attendance. Each classroom was planned with identifiable interest areas which included rest and reading areas, home/kitchen areas, construction and creativity areas and sensory play areas.

Areas were resourced with appropriate themed play equipment such as kitchen equipment, toy food, manipulative and connective blocks, and materials. Low level shelving in each classroom provided all the various aged groups of children with access to visually labelled boxes of small world figurines, vehicles, train tracks, dolls, and toys. In the baby room the five children aged 1 to 2 years were observed playing with sensory activity centres and treasure baskets of suitable materials and textures.

There was evidence of curricular planning observed in the service with a current theme of the Chinese New Year and "The Year of the Dragon" being explored. The classrooms were subtly decorated with oriental lanterns, red and gold paper chains and dragons made from the children's colourful handprints.

Children were playing with colourful red pasta on an activity tray, or colourful pom poms in the turtle sensory tray. The children demonstrated to the inspector that they had learned to use chopsticks confidently to grasp and transfer the pasta shells and pom poms. The children eagerly explained to the inspector that the red pasta had not been purchased in a shop but had been specially created by their early years educator for their study of the Chinese New Year.

Individual children's learning journals correlated with documented curricular planning. Each child's learning journal contained photographic evidence of the child participating in planned activities and evidence of the work that they created.

Interest boards in the classrooms provided the staff with opportunities to document children’s emergent interests and to plan with the children on how to incorporate their interests into the curriculum in the service. For example, the children’s interest in dinosaurs had resulted in the children’s creation of their “dinosaur branch” with the children creating a “tree” of dinosaurs, while learning the various types of dinosaurs.

Children were observed participating in Montessori tasks, cutting, colouring, and drawing, discussing how the colour white was not obvious on white paper.

(b) The inspector observed that the children’s individual needs were appropriately and suitably cared for. Staff responded to children’s cues when tired, hungry, or upset, ensuring that they were reassured and comforted. Children’s nappy changing and toileting needs were attended to as required while independence and the child’s dignity was supported by the staff. Staff were observed to listen effectively to the children at their level, encouraging the children to express themselves and to participate in activities and interests that they wanted to.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The inspector observed that the registered provider and staff ensured that the children in the service received a varied and nutritious diet while in attendance at the service. Each room had a drinks station with children in the older classrooms accessing their drinks bottle and water jugs independently. In the younger classrooms, the children each had a beaker or water container which staff frequently supported their access to, ensuring that each child used their own water. Appropriate eating equipment was provided for all ages.

Children had their meals in the dining area adjacent to the kitchen. Highchairs were provided for the younger children with suitable tables and chairs available for the older children.

A selection of wheat and rice-based cereals and fresh toast was available for breakfast in the mornings, where children arrived at the service at opening time.

Staff and children informed the inspector that they brought their morning snack from home or else the service provided a selection of fruit, cheese or hummus and breadsticks, crackers, or rice cakes.

Dinner on the day of inspection was observed to be pasta bolognese, cooked onsite and in line with the service’s menu-plan. Beef mince, with finely diced mixed vegetables was served in a tomato-based sauce with pasta shells.

Other main meals in the service's menu plan included chicken casserole and mash, chicken supreme with boiled rice, shepherd's pie, burgers, mash and beans, chicken and penne pasta bake and roast chicken, potato mash and vegetables.

A warm evening meal was also provided from a selection of soups - potato, courgette and leek or vegetable soup with crusty bread, fish fingers, beans and toast, green/red pesto pasta bake with garlic bread, scrambled eggs on toast, toasted sandwiches, and fruit and on Fridays as a treat oven chips and chicken goujons. On the evening of the inspection, the children were offered homemade pizza.

The registered provider and manager demonstrated that other food options were available in the refrigerator such as cold meats, crackers, soups, and pasta were in stock, if a child did not like what was on the menu.

In line with the service's healthy eating policy the staff discussed with the inspector that parents were welcome to send foods from home for the children which were stored or refrigerated according to safe food guidelines.

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) There were two staff members present in the service with current first aid responder (FAR) training for children. The staff roster reflected that there was always at least one staff member with current FAR training onsite while the children were in attendance.

(2) (a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and clearly identifiable on a shelf in the kitchen.

(b) The first aid box was always available to the children and records demonstrated that its contents were checked and replaced, if necessary, monthly.

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.
- (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) A record of monthly fire drills carried out in the service was maintained, the last fire drill carried out in the service was recorded as having taken place on the 17 January 2024.
- (b) A record of the annual maintenance checks of fire-fighting equipment in the service was maintained. The last maintenance check of the smoke alarm system was recorded as having taken place on the 23 November 2023 and the firefighting equipment was last serviced in March 2023.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was clearly displayed on a notice board in the hallway.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was displayed on the notice board in the entrance hall of the service, detailing that adequate insurance was in place for a full day childcare service for up to a maximum number of 31 early years children.