

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH006
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Name of Service:	Aunty Paula's Pre School and Creche
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Address of Service:	394A Ballsgrove, Drogheda, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A92 Y2FT
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Name of Registered Provider:	Paula Maguire
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	27/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	18	PM	8
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath C15 CP23
Inspection undertaken by:	S Taaffe
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
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Description of service

Aunty Paula's Pre School and Creche is a privately-owned part-time early years service which has been in operation since 2000. The service caters for up to 30 pre-school children aged 2 to 6 years, facilitating eligible children to avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme from 8.45 to 11.45am, with some of these pre-school children attending on a part-time basis until 1.45pm at the latest. School aged children are accommodated in the service from 1.45 to 5.00pm daily. The service operates for 38 weeks each year, following the ECCE calendar. Aunty Paula's Pre School and Creche is conducted from three care rooms, namely the Green Room, the Blue Room and the Red Room which are located on the ground floor and in a rear extension of a residential property located in a housing estate in Drogheda. Ancillary accommodation includes the Cabin where school aged children are accommodated, a kitchenette, office and sanitary facilities. A fully enclosed outdoor play area is provided to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider is present in the service on a daily basis, engaging in administrative duties and overseeing a team of seven staff members, including an assistant manager, who work directly with the pre-school children in the service.

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.

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

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider in relation to excessively hot water at a sink where children were facilitated to wash their hands during the inspection. The registered provider provided written assurances to the Inspectorate of appropriate immediate action undertaken to address the risk identified within 24 hours of issue. This response was accepted.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, assistant manager, 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

(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 was the designated person in charge of the service in relation to administrative functions, engaging with parents and caring for school aged children, supported by the assistant manager who was in charge in relation to the service provided to pre-school children. Both the registered provider and the assistant manager work in the service on a daily basis. A named staff member was appointed to deputise as the person in charge when required.

(b) The registered provider and the assistant manager were present on the premises when the inspector arrived unannounced on the day of inspection and both remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

A total of 8 staff files were reviewed, maintained in respect of the registered provider and the 7 staff members employed in the service.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the 8 adults whose files were reviewed.

- (a) Twelve written references were from past employers.
- (b) Four written references were from sources other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the registered provider and for the 7 staff members. Each of these records demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) In relation to the 8 files reviewed, international police vetting was available as required for 1 staff member who had resided outside of the Irish jurisdiction for more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (4) The 7 staff members employed in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed to be equivalent while one of these staff members had been issued with a letter of eligibility to practice following an assessment of their qualification by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY).

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) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the service.
- (2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service during the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed:

- In the Green Room there were 3 children aged 2 years 3 months to 2 years 11 months being cared for by 1 staff member. One of these children was present in the service for 1 hour on the day of the inspection as part of their settling in period.
- In the Blue Room there were 6 children aged 4 years 3 months to 4 years 10 months being cared for by 2 staff members.
- In the Red Room there were 9 children aged 3 to 4 years 4 months being cared for by 2 staff members, one of whom was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary to work directly with a child with additional needs, in a post which was funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

Throughout the inspection the deputy manager provided support and assistance in the care rooms when required while the registered provider coordinated the operational management of the service.

(8)(a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times, as evidenced in staff rosters and staff attendance records maintained in the service.

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

(1)(a) The following are examples of how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs of the Children:

- The staff members were observed engaging respectfully with the children throughout the inspection, responding to the children in an interested and engaged manner. The staff members ensured children's

needs were met promptly and were observed regularly updating each other on the requirements and preferences of the children in their care.

- Children brought their own healthy packed lunches and drinks from home to the service. The staff members sat and chatted with the children during snack time, encouraging conversation and extending interactions in a sociable manner. The first snack was served at around 10.00am while children who attended the service on a part-time basis availed of a second snack at 1.00pm.
- The children's nappies were changed regularly and in a timely manner when required. The staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with reminders, discreet supervision and assistance provided by the adults when required.
- No child was observed sleeping during the inspection. The inspector was informed that children who showed signs of tiredness or needed sleep were facilitated to sleep on one of the 3 stackable beds provided on the premises which would be set up in a quiet care room if required. During the inspection children were observed taking a break from activities, resting and relaxing on the floor mats and cushions provided at the library areas in the three care rooms.
- Once the heavy rainy conditions which prevailed on the morning of the inspection cleared, all children were facilitated to play outdoors.

Supporting Relationships around Children

- The staff members were observed using warm vocal tones when engaging with the children, offering praise and encouragement for their efforts and involvement in activities.
- The inspector observed that children's transitions were well supported with verbal strategies including tidy-up-themed songs and timers used by the staff members to inform and prepare children for upcoming activities and movement. A child in the Green Room who was settling into the service needed additional support and comforting at times during the hour when the child was present and this was promptly and kindly offered by the staff member and assistant manager, with cuddles, reassuring words and singing provided with soothing effect.
- Staff members were observed displaying anticipation and appropriate responsiveness when children experienced challenges within the environment and when children chose to change or opt out of activities or seek movement to an alternative environment. Age-appropriate and positive strategies including re-direction, distraction and problem-solving were among the techniques observed being used

by the staff members to good effect to prevent the escalation of any minor problems that arose between the children.

- Parents were provided with the opportunity to exchange information about their children informally with the registered provider and staff members at drop off and collection times. Additionally, the service regularly shared relevant information electronically with the parents in relation to activities, the learning themes being implemented, and updates regarding their child’s progress on a softwear application programme (an App).

Physical and material environment:

- Each of the three care rooms, although not spacious, were laid out in defined interest areas to encourage spontaneous play experiences for the children. The interest areas included home corners, construction areas, art stations and libraries.
- The low level shelving units in the care rooms ensured that the materials and equipment were freely available to children, facilitating choice as items of interest were located at the children’s eye level. Play equipment on these shelves included books, musical instruments, jigsaw puzzles, shape sorters, animals, and manipulative materials such as wooden blocks, pegs, magnets and plastic interlocking and connecting materials.
- A broad range of additional play materials and books were provided in the Cabin and the registered provider and staff members informed the inspector that these were rotated into use in each care room, based on the children’s particular interests.
- Family photographs were on display in each care room which supported the children to develop a sense of belonging and connectedness in the service.
- The hard surfaced fully enclosed outdoor play area was directly accessed from the Blue Room. A narrow section of rigid plastic sheeting was in place along one side to provide shelter. A wooden open-fronted structure with a roof contained two tyres filled with sand and bark. Play equipment was provided including an outdoor kitchen with supportive play resources including pots and pans, a large upright plastic 4-in-a-row frame, balance beams, scooters, wall-mounted piping for pouring and water play, and child-sized seating and benches.

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

The following are examples of the measures undertaken by the registered providers and staff members to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service:

General Safety:

- The entrance doors leading into the premises were secured to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised or an unauthorised adult from entering the service.
- The outdoor play area was fully enclosed by the walls of the premises and a neighbouring boundary wall which ensured that a child could not leave unaccompanied.
- The service kitchen and the adjoining residential premises were inaccessible to children during the inspection.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.

Infection Control:

- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet and following messy play and outdoor play. Liquid soap and paper hand towels were provided for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the service.
- A refrigerator was available and used to store the children's snacks provided from home which reduced the risk of bacteria growth in perishable food items.
- Tissues were available for wiping noses and appropriate hand hygiene practices were observed being undertaken when staff members assisted children to clean their noses.
- Up to date documented cleaning schedules were on display.
- A suitable pedal-operated lidded bin was provided in the sanitary area for the disposal of children's nappies which reduced odour emissions and the risk of cross-infection.
- Lids were available to cover the outdoor sand pit and bark pit when not in use to prevent contamination by animals and birds.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored safely out of children's reach.

- The service had a medication protocol available in respect of a child with a specific medical condition, to authorise staff members to administer a prescribed medication in the event of a medical emergency.

Safe Sleep:

- In discussion with the inspector, staff members described safe sleep practices including the requirement to conduct and record sleep checks at 10 minutes intervals, noting the child's position, colour and breathing pattern, should a child sleep in the service during the day. No child was observed sleeping during the inspection.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency exits were clear and unobstructed.

Outings:

- The inspector was informed that the service participated in occasional outings going on walks in the local vicinity. The registered provider maintained records of risk assessments which had been done in advance of outings taking place and written consent was obtained from the children's parent or guardian prior to the outings being undertaken.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The hot water supply provided at the wash hand basin in the sanitary accommodation adjoining the Green Room was recorded at 58.3°C at 11.09am when pre-school children were being facilitated to wash their hands. This exceeded the maximum safe water temperature of 43°C and posed a risk of scalding. When identified, the inspector informed the staff member caring for the children of this scalding risk and this wash hand basin was not used for the remainder of the inspection. An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider in relation to this risk.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water was not available for hand washing at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation adjoining the Blue Room. The water in each tap felt cold to touch. Cold water does not support pre-school children to effectively wash their hands.
- Children were not facilitated to wash their hands after having their nappies changed which posed a risk of cross-contamination.
- Staff members did not wear disposable plastic aprons while changing the children's nappies. Plastic aprons reduce the risk of contamination of outer clothing.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective actions and preventive actions have been undertaken:

General Safety:

Corrective Action

1. On the day of inspection, once the temperature of the water was brought to the attention of management, the registered provider immediately closed off the wash hand basin adjoining the Green Room and contacted a plumber. The plumber made arrangements to call to the service on 04/02/2025 to address the temperature of the water. On that day the plumber fitted a thermostat to the sink and adjusted it to the maximum temperature of 42°C.

Preventive Action

1. Now that the thermostat is installed it will remain there and will be checked regularly. Also a water thermometer has been purchased so that staff can take the temperature of water regularly.

Infection Control:

Corrective Action

2. On the same day the plumber came he adjusted the thermostat on the sink adjoining the Blue Room to a temperature of 42°C.
3. During a staff meeting on 29/01/2025 staff were reminded to facilitate hand washing after nappy changing and were advised to review the policy.
4. Also during the staff meeting staff were reminded to wear the plastic aprons provided while changing nappies and also to review the nappy changing policy.

Preventive Action

2. Maintenance and checks will be carried out of the thermostat adjoining the Blue Room.
3. Management will redirect staff to reflect on nappy changing policy.
4. Management will redirect staff to reflect on nappy changing policy and also be reminded that aprons are always provided.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Photographs of thermostatic controls in place on pipework.
- Photograph of water temperature probe reading 41.2°C.

- Copy of a plumber's invoice dated 04/02/2025 in relation to the fitting of a temperature control valve and the adjustment of an existing temperature control valve in the service.
- A record of the attendees and listed agenda items for discussion (including nappy changing) for the service's staff meeting held on 29/01/2025.
- Copy of the service's nappy changing policy.

Summary Comment

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider in relation to excessively hot water found during the inspection. The registered provider provided written assurances to the Inspectorate of appropriate immediate action undertaken to address the risk identified within 24 hours of issue. This response was accepted.

The inspector reviewed all corrective actions and documentation submitted by the registered provider after the inspection. The non-compliances found on inspection under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) The service maintained accurate details of all children in attendance during the inspection. The children were entered as present on the mobile tablet devices used to record attendance, noting each child's arrival and departure times.

(3)(a)(b) The service ensured that no person other than the children and their parents or guardians, employees, approved students or authorised visitors could enter the premises. A visitor's book was maintained and on arrival the inspector was requested to record her attendance in the service and the purpose of her visit.

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 registered provider ensured that a person with in-date first aid response (FAR) training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service as evidenced in the staff files reviewed records and the service's staff roster.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes provided in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations on the premises and these were available for the children in attendance, in the event of an emergency.

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) A record was maintained of fire drills which had been completed in the service, with the records indicating and the staff members reporting that these procedures were carried out on a monthly basis. The last recorded fire drill took place on 14/12/2024.

(b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. Fire extinguishers were certified as having been serviced on 15/07/2024 and the smoke detection system on 11/06/2024.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider had insurance cover in place for 30 children attending the service on a part-time basis. The policy was valid from 28/03/2024 to 27/03/2025.