

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH017
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Name of Service:	Clever Clogs
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Address of Service:	St. Brigid's National School, Bothar Brugha, Drogheda, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A92 Y236
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Name of Registered Provider:	Barbara Rothwell
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	16/01/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	35	PM	11
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, 181-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co. Dublin K67 Y5C6.
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

Clever Clogs in St. Brigid's National School is one of three early years services operated by the registered provider, all of which are located in Drogheda in Co. Louth. The service is conducted from two adjoining prefabricated units positioned on the grounds of a primary school and is registered to accommodate a maximum of 44 pre-school children aged 2 – 6 years. Although registered to operate as a full day care, currently all pre-school children attend the service on a sessional or part-time basis. Eligible pre-school children are facilitated to avail of the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme daily from 9.00am to 12.00midday. School age children are also accommodated in the service. Two separate outdoor play areas are provided for sole use by the children attending the early years service.

Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service and generally engages in administrative duties off-site, with an area manager employed to coordinate the day to day management of the three services. Nine staff members are employed in this service, of whom 7 work directly with the pre-school children and who hold a major awards in early childhood care and education at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ). One of these 7 staff members is employed as a supervisor who is the designated person in charge of the service in the absence of the area manager. A further staff member is employed to work each afternoon caring for school age children only and another staff member is employed to clean the service for 3 hours each day. On the day of inspection a college student was present in the service on a work experience placement as part of a Level 5 Early Childhood Care and Education training course.

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 15 – Record of pre-school child.

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 area 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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The service supervisor was the designated person in charge of the service and in her absence the area manager would deputise as required.

(b) In addition to the supervisor, the area manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at 9.55am on the morning of inspection. The area manager was present in the service for the duration of the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed, twelve in total. These files were maintained for the registered provider, the area manager, the 9 core staff members and the student on work placement who was present in the service on the day of inspection.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the registered provider, the area manager, the 9 core staff members and the student.

(a) Fourteen written references were from past employers.

(b) Ten written references were from sources other than a previous employer.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the registered provider, the area manager, the 9 staff members and the student.

(d) An international police vetting disclosure was available for the one staff member who had lived outside the State as an adult for more than 6 consecutive months.

(4) The registered provider, the area manager and the 7 staff members who work directly with pre-school children in the service all held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

(7) The inspector viewed records in the service which demonstrated that the area manager conducted staff supervision with all staff members at least twice annually to affirm or address practice issues and to support the staff members in relation to their professional development plans and proposals.

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 was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed during the inspection:

- In the Butterfly Room there were 20 children aged between 3 years 5 months and 5 years 5 months being cared for by 3 staff members. One of the 3 staff members was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio, and to work directly with a child with additional needs when necessary, as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.
- In the Caterpillar Room there were 15 children aged between 3 years 1 month and 4 years being cared for by 3 staff members, including the area manager who was covering for a staff member on leave. One of the 3 staff members was employed to reduce the adult to child ratio, and to work directly with a child with additional needs when necessary, as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme. A student undertaking a childcare qualification was also present in this room on a work experience placement, working with the children under supervision in a supernumerary capacity.

All children were attending the service on a sessional or part-time basis on the day of the inspection.

(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 IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

Compliance Information

(1) A sampling process was used in relation to the children's records. Twelve registration forms were sampled and found to be appropriately completed with the required information as specified in sub-sections (a) to (i) in this regulation.

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 observations were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life of the service.

Basic needs:

- The service was actively engaging with an early years specialist quality development service, obtaining support in relation to meeting the children's individual and, for some, their additional needs in order to enhance children's play and learning experiences.
- There was a relaxed and child-centred atmosphere in the service. The staff members were observed to be warm and caring in their interactions with the children and demonstrated sensitivity and responsiveness to each child's individual needs, likes and preferences. The staff members spoke positively and warmly to and about the children during the inspection.
- Healthy snacks and drinks were provided by the parents for the children for their morning snack. These included sandwiches, rice cakes, crackers, yogurts, fruit, cheese and water. The staff members sat with the children at snack time, modelling positive behaviours by eating their own healthy snacks and encouraging conversations in a friendly manner. Drinking water was freely available to the children at snack time and throughout the day. Children attending the service on a part-time basis were offered the option to have a second snack after the ECCE session had ended. Dinner was not provided this year as the attendance records indicated that no pre-school child was present for longer than 5 hours and all pre-school children had left the service by 2.00pm on a daily basis.
- The staff members were observed to be responsive to the children's cues, should they need to use the toilet and the children were accompanied to the sanitary accommodation by a staff member during these procedures, with discreet supervision provided and assistance if required. Three children who were attending the service on a sessional basis wore nappies and these were changed when required.

- Children were facilitated to rest on couches, soft matting and cushions in the library areas of the pre-school rooms, if they wished to rest or relax during the day.
- All children engaged in outdoor play on the frosty day of inspection, dressed appropriately in coats, hats, and gloves.

Supporting relationships:

- The staff members were observed to be warm and caring in their interactions with the children. The staff members demonstrated sensitivity and responsiveness to each child's needs (both individual needs and, for some children, their additional needs), thereby fostering each child's inclusion and involvement in activities, based on the children's preferences, interests and abilities.
- The staff members demonstrated skilful interaction strategies to support the children's learning and development including occasions when staff members were play partners and followed the children's interests in their chosen activities which the children seemed to enjoy. For example, one staff member was observed sitting on the ground with a group of children playing with cars and dinosaurs and encouraging their imaginative play. Another staff member was observed playing with children who were pushing small cars down the slide in the outdoor area, with the staff member marking where the cars stopped and encouraging the children to try and get their cars to travel further. Many children demonstrated a sense of pride in their success during the inspection and were observed calling on the staff members to share their achievements, with the staff members heard to readily acknowledge and praise the children's efforts and accomplishments.
- Staff members were heard gently encouraging children to be mindful of the feelings of those around them which promoted interactions based on respect and partnership.
- The children were prepared for transitions by the use of timers, verbal signposting by describing what was coming next and singing familiar 'tidy-up' songs.
- Staff members in both care rooms appeared to work well as a team as they communicated with one another throughout the day regarding children's care needs, the routine and materials needed and as evidenced by the smooth handover of responsibilities at staff break times. The staff members engaged with parents, grandparents and childminders in a friendly and familiar way when they arrived to collect the children.

Physical and material environment:

- The two rooms were laid out in different interest areas to ensure they were visually stimulating and inviting for children. The interest areas included home corners containing wooden kitchen units equipped with real world utensils, crockery and appliances; shop areas; art areas with recyclable materials; construction areas and well-resourced library areas.
- The play materials and equipment were positioned at an accessible level for the children on open shelving which nurtured independence and facilitated choice. There was a broad range of natural, sensory and open-ended materials in the service to facilitate sensory play experiences and encourage the children's creativity and imagination. For example, dried pasta trays and rice trays were provided in both rooms and some children in the Caterpillar Room were highly engaged in chipping at a basin-sized block of ice to remove the plastic dinosaurs contained within. Loose parts provided to support open-ended play experiences included lengths of pipes, timber pieces, smooth-edged skirting boards and lengths of corrugated tubing.
- The learning environment in both rooms positively promoted cultural diversity and a respect for difference. For example, the children were facilitated to see themselves and their families reflected in posters, books and in the play, resources including dolls, small play figures and jig-saws provided. Signage on the fridges showed the word 'lunch' in English, Irish and a number of other languages.
- The rear enclosed outdoor play area adjoining the Caterpillar Room was surfaced in artificial grass and contained a roofed wooden structure enclosed on three sides which was equipped with a low level slide, farm animals, dinosaurs, large plastic blocks and a standard couch. In the outer uncovered section, play equipment included a slide, cars, trucks, scooters, and a wooden playhouse set up as a Garda station. The enclosed outdoor play area to the front of the Butterfly Room was fully surfaced with artificial grass and contained a roofed wooden structure enclosed on three sides which was equipped with a lidded sand table, an outdoor kitchen, balance beams, a blackboard with chalk, a climbing A-frame and a sensory board with bolts, latches, hinges, castors and switches. In the outer uncovered section, a wooden tepee, wall-mounted guttering, ride-on toys and a fairy schoolhouse was provided to facilitate outdoor play experiences for the children.

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:

- The premises was appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the early years service. A numerical push-button lock was in place externally at the main entrance doors in both portacabins. Access to the premises was facilitated by a staff member who, having sight of callers through the glass panels in advance of facilitating their entry, released the high-level magnetic door locks from inside.
- The water temperature at the hot taps on the low-level sinks in both pre-school rooms and in the sanitary accommodation adjoining each pre-school room did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C. This reduced the risk of injury from scalding for the children in attendance.
- The kitchenette in the Caterpillar Room was partitioned off, making it inaccessible to the children.
- The blind cords were appropriately secured and made safe.
- The play materials and equipment available in the service were stored on stable-based low level shelving which reduced the risk of the furniture from toppling over and causing injury to a child.
- The two outdoor play areas were appropriately secured with gated fencing.

Infection Control:

- A refrigerator was available and used in both pre-school rooms to store the children's snacks provided from home by the parents. This reduced the risk of bacteria growth in perishable food items.
- The children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, after nappy changing and following messy play and outdoor play. There was running warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels available for hand hygiene at the wash hand basins in the service.
- Appropriate disposable gloves and aprons were available and worn for each individual nappy change.
- Tissues were available for wiping noses and appropriate hand hygiene practices were observed being undertaken when staff members assisted children to blow their noses.
- Up to date documented cleaning schedules were available in the service.

Administration of Medication:

- No child attending the service required any medication to be administered on the day of inspection. Temperature-reducing medications were stored out of the reach of children.

Safe Sleep:

- Four stackable beds with individual bed linen were provided should a child wish to sleep in the service. No child slept on the day of inspection. The staff members demonstrated an awareness of national safe sleep 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) Four core staff members and the area manager held in-date First Aid Response (FAR) training. Based on a review of the staff members' training records and the service's staff roster, it was evident that the registered provider ensured that a person with FAR training was at all times immediately available to the children attending the service.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid boxes available in the service were suitably equipped and stored in conspicuous locations in both pre-school rooms 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. Based on the records maintained and as reported by staff members, fire drills were carried out monthly. The last recorded fire drill took place on 19/12/2023.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises. Fire extinguishers were certified as having been serviced on 14/12/2023 and the smoke detection system was serviced on 27/11/2023.
- (4) The evacuation procedure was conspicuously displayed on the premises which contained details in relation to the procedure to be conducted in the event of a fire or emergency in the service.