

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH024
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Name of Service:	ABC Childsplay Creche
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Address of Service:	Townspark, Castletown Road, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 HD82
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Name of Registered Provider:	Gerard McDonnell
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	13/06/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	21	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	No.18 The Grange Plantation Walk Monaghan
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Inspection undertaken by:	S. Skinnader
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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

ABC Childsplay Creche is a privately owned service which is in operation since 2002. It provides a sessional service to children aged 1 – 6 years. The service caters for a maximum of 43 children. The service partakes in the ECCE scheme and opens from 9 am – 12.15 pm Monday to Friday. This service is located in the town of Dundalk Co. Louth and it operates from a purpose-built building. There are 3 care rooms (Pods), sanitary accommodation, an office, a multi-purpose room, kitchen area and an outdoor play area to the back of the building.

Staffing

There were 7 staff members employed in the service including the service manager who work directly with the preschool children.

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.

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 deputy 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*

(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) & (b) The service had a designated person in charge and named deputy person to deputise as required. The deputy person in charge was on the premises when the inspector arrived and was present throughout the inspection.

All 7 staff files were reviewed:

(2)(a) & (b) There were

- 2 written and validated references from a past employer or an alternative source available for 6 members of staff in the service.
- One staff had 2 written references.

(c) Documentary evidence of a processed Garda Vetting Disclosure was available for each of the 7 staff members. The registered provider adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the 7 staff members had a childcare qualification which met the minimum Level 5 qualification required to enable them to work directly with the preschool children.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a) and (b) One staff member's 2 written references were not validated.

(d) Following a review of the staff files presented for inspection, documentary evidence of international police vetting was not available for 1 staff member who had lived outside the Irish jurisdiction for a period of 6 months or more as an adult.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a) The 2 references have been validated by the manager on the 16/06/2025. The staff validation record has been updated and added to the recruitment folder.

The staff file checklist will be attached to the front of the file rather than in it, in order to ensure it is complete and up to date. Regular checks of staff files will be added to the managers checklist.

(2)(d) The staff member in question has contacted the relevant organisation and is awaiting the results of the international police vetting.

The recruitment policy has been updated to include police vetting for any staff member who has worked outside Ireland for a period of 6 months or longer.

Supporting documentation submitted

References submitted.

Police Vetting documentation.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response and supporting information was reviewed by the inspectorate. The non-compliance in Regulation 9(2)(a) has been addressed.

The supporting documentation for the non-compliance identified in Regulation 9(2)(d) is insufficient and therefore the non-compliance has not been fully addressed and remains outstanding.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

The Healthy Eating Policy requires updating as it is currently not specific to the service for example it references "Food is only purchased from reputable suppliers....." and references an outside caterer. Furthermore, it refers to 3 weekly and 4 weekly menus that are available and age appropriate and "suitable sized portions" when food is not supplied by the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The healthy eating policy has been updated to reflect the service opening hours. Recommendations that the Healthy eating policy is adhered to by the parents are also included.

Staff will be trained in the new updated Healthy Eating Policy on the 25/8/25, when all staff have rejoined the setting after the summer break.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of updated Health Eating Policy.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response has been reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance has been addressed and will be for review at the next inspection.

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) During the inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service in the 3 pods.
- (3) The child: adult ratios were correct during the inspection. The following adult: child ratios were observed in the care rooms when the inspector arrived at the premises:

Pod A (Toddler Room upstairs):

- There were 8 preschool children (aged 2 years and 4 months – 3 years and 4 months) attending this room with 2 childcare staff.

Pod B (Preschool Room downstairs):

- There were 8 preschool children (aged 3 - 4 years) being cared for by 1 adult.

Pod C (Preschool Room downstairs):

- There were 5 preschool children (aged 4 - 5 years) attending this room with 2 childcare staff.

One other adult was available as a floater between the rooms to provide assistance predominately in Pods A and B.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;

Non-Compliance Information

16(1)(h) The children in Pod C were not signed in on the daily attendance record and a staff member was observed to retrospectively commence completing the attendance sheet while the inspector was in the room.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

16(1)(h) Staff have been spoken to in relation to the importance of ensuring all children are signed in upon arrival, staff will also be retrained in the record keeping policy.

Re-training of staff to take place on the 25/08/25 in order to ensure that the record keeping policy is adhered to.

The Managers daily checklist has been updated to include the daily policies are maintained and up to date.

Staff will be informed that warnings will be issued if they fail to adhere policies and procedures, within the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of warning and checklist.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response is accepted and the non-compliance addressed. This will be for review at the next inspection.

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

There were 3 rooms in operation on the day of the inspection namely Pod A, Pod B and Pod C.

(1)(a) The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider facilitated each child's learning and development:

Basic Needs:

- The children's lunches in the morning were provided by the parents. Assistance was given to the younger children who required help with opening lunches and certain foods. Bibs were put on the younger children before meals plus hands and faces cleaned appropriately after the meals.
- Bottles of cow's milk were sent in by the parents for those who took them.
- All children were dressed appropriately to go outside as the children from Pod A and C had a change of environment to the outdoor area.
- Nappies were changed regularly and in a timely manner with pleasant interactions observed between children and staff. Any children who were toilet trained were encouraged to be independent with toileting and discreet supervision also provided by staff as required.
- It was reported that no children slept however in Pod A, a child who want to lie down to rest for a few minutes at lunchtime was facilitated to do so.

Supporting Relationships

- In general, soft tones, positive and respectful language were observed in interactions between the children in all the rooms for example in Pod B *"put your hands out sweetheart"*, *"would you like to eat yours now pet"*, *"good job"* and *"listen here my friend"*.
- Staff were observed to sit with children during indoor tabletop activities and also support the children's outdoor play for example when the children were partaking in a bun making and decorating activity, during art activities and when children were in the outdoor area.
- A key worker system was in operation in the service.
- Communication with parents was predominantly informal at drop off and collection times. The deputy in charge also reported the use of a messaging application, a social media page and newsletter to inform parents of activities.

Physical and Material Environment

- A variety of age-appropriate toys and materials were available in Pods B and C. These items supported many areas of development such as fine motor skills, role play and sensory development.

- Toys and equipment were positioned on open low-level shelving in all rooms which promoted independence and facilitated choice for the children enabling them to choose the items they wished to play with.
- It was reported by the deputy in charge that there are toys which are rotated and additional toys are purchased if there is a strong interest in a particular toy.

Programme Of Activities

- A variety of the children's art activities and photographs from the year were compiled in books for each child for the children's graduation the following week. The children were observed in Pod C working on Father's Day cards.
- Staff reported that plans had commenced to provide additional supports for children who would require this assistance in the new school year.
- Activities that promoted the children's language development such as the social conversations between the staff and children were observed for example during the bun making activity, at lunchtime and in the outdoor area.

Non-Compliance Information

1. A number of children were observed drinking juice from baby bottles / drink bottles. While it is acknowledged that these were not provided by the service it is at variance with the service healthy eating policy which states "All meals..... will be served with milk and /or water." Furthermore, lunches provided by the parents on the day of inspection especially in Pod A were observed to contain numerous treats. Staff confirmed that Friday was treat day however again this is at variance with the healthy eating policy of the service which states "Parents are asked not to send sweets, crisps, biscuits and other snack foods to the preschool."
2. The material and physical environment in the Pod B in parts was poorly resourced for the children attending as defined interest areas had limited supporting toys and equipment. For example, the home area consisted of 3 kitchen units with sinks and ovens, a table and 2 chairs, 1 toaster, 1 kettle, 1 small pot, a saucepan lid and chopping board. The doll area consisted of 4 dolls and a carry tot.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The Healthy eating policy has been updated to reflect the settings opening hours, recommendations for parents are included to ensure the Healthy Eating Policy is adhered to.

A healthy eating agreement policy has been developed and added to the parents handbook for them to sign and return to the setting, it will subsequently be then added to the childrens' files.

- The setting environment will be replenished with new resources and equipment, for the coming term and will be continuously checked throughout the year to ensure the setting is maintained to a high standard. The checking of stock and resources have been added to the managers daily checklist.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of new Healthy Eating Policy and agreement. Manager's checklist.

Photographic evidence.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response and supporting information is accepted and the non-compliances addressed. The registered providers implementation of the corrective and preventative actions stated will be for review at the next inspection.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

(4) Where outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access is provided on the premises of a sessional pre-school service other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, a temporary pre-school service or a pre-school service in a drop-in centre, the registered provider shall ensure that such outdoor space is suitable, safe and secure.

Compliance Information

(1)(b) There was a soft comfortable area in each of the care rooms for a child to take a break and relax from activities or lie down if they so wished.

- In Pod A it consisted of a daybed, some cushions and 2 child sized fabric covered armchairs.
- In Pod B it consisted of a daybed with light duvets, cushions and soft toys.
- In Pod C it consisted of a child sized plastic chair and puffa, a bean bag and soft toys.

(4) There was an outdoor area to the rear of the building which was fully enclosed and walled. There was a tarmacked area which was partially covered. There were 2 pallets with car seats and steering wheels, a water tray, metal rotating see-saw, a secured water butt, rockers, 2 wooden playhouses and basketball hoop. There was also 3 safety surfaced areas with picnic bench, small plastic slide, metal climbing frame, sand tray and wooden mud kitchen.

Non-Compliance Information

1. There were no resources for the mud kitchen in the outdoor area to enhance the play experience for the children.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The mud kitchen in the outdoor area have been replenished; basins, utensils, pots and pans have added for the coming term.
Checking of stock and resources in the play environment have been added to the managers daily checklist.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response is accepted and the non-compliance has been addressed. This will be for review at the next inspection.

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

It was observed that the registered provider has taken the following measures to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service including:

General Safety:

- The external doors were appropriately secured to prevent children from exiting the service unsupervised.

- There was written documentary evidence of daily risk assessments in the service.
- Cleaning equipment/ sprays were stored up high out of reach of the children.
- Fire doors were unobstructed.

Infection Control:

- There was a constant supply of thermostatically controlled hot water and liquid hand soap available to support effective hand washing throughout the service.
- Nappy changing practices observed in general with the exception of the non-compliance noted below were good with staff adhering to best practice guidelines when changing nappies.
- Tabletops were wiped down prior to and after snack times and after activities.
- Pedal operated bins were observed in use in the service.
- Mouthed toys boxes were available in the service.

Non-Compliance Information

The registered provider did not ensure that all reasonable measures were taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a preschool child in relation to the following:

General Safety:

1. In Pod A there were unprotected sharp edges on the plastic conduit running along the wall beside one of the children's soft chairs and on the white shelving units. In Pod B there were unprotected sharp edges on white shelving units. These are a potential injury hazard.
2. In Pod A one of the shelving units was in a state of disrepair as the back was coming off the unit and this was accessible to the preschool children as it was used to block off the toilet. This was a potential injury / pinch risk.
3. In Pod C there were wall mounted dangling fairy lights which were accessible to the preschool children. These were a potential injury/ strangulation risk.

Infection Control:

4. A baby's bottle of milk was observed incorrectly stored sitting on the counter-top uncovered in Pod A and not refrigerated and lidded as is best practice.
5. Single use paper towels were not available for use in the downstairs sanitary accommodation / nappy changing or upstairs toilet area. This does not facilitate effective hand washing. It is acknowledged that staff reported that they currently do not use the upstairs toilet.

6. Children were observed to be taken to the nappy changing area to have their nappies changed, one with a plastic bib still on and 1 with a soother in their mouth. This is not best practice and an infection control and cross contamination risk.
7. After nappy changing a staff member was observed to wash the child's hands with the gloves which they had worn to change the nappy still on. This is not effective hand washing and a cross-contamination risk.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. All edges have been covered, ensuring the safety of the children.
 2. The shelving unit has been removed, to reduce the risk of injury to the children.
 3. The fairy lights have been placed higher on the wall, so they are not accessible to the children.
- 1,2,3, Shelving and lights have been added to the managers daily checklist,
Staff will be re-trained in reducing risks within the service on the 25/08/25, to ensure the safety of the children.

Infection Control:

4. The Health and Safety policy has been updated, to include best practise on the storage of bottles containing milk.
Staff will be re-trained in the updated Health and Safety Policy, ensuring that the staff act in the best interest of the child.
5. Re-stocking of the bathroom supplies has been added to the managers daily checklist.
The managers daily checklist has been updated to include a stock check of the bathroom area.
6. Staff will be re-trained on the infection control policy and the importance of the child not wearing a bib or having their soother whilst in the nappy changing area.
Staff will be informed that warnings will be issued if they fail to adhere to the settings policies and procedures.
7. Staff will be re-trained on the nappy changing policy, ensuring that the correct protocol is being followed at all times.
Staff will be informed that warnings will be issued if they fail to adhere to the settings policies and procedures.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Photographic evidence.

Infection Control:

Copy of mangers checklist / copy of warning document.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response and supporting evidence was reviewed and accepted. The non-compliances identified in Regulation 23 have been addressed. The implementation of the corrective and preventative actions stated will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) The registered provider did not ensure that there was a person trained in First Aid Response (FAR) for children, on the premises at all times. FAR certificates available were out of date.

It is acknowledged that documentary evidence was available to confirm a number of staff had completed basic first aid training.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

First Aid Responder certification course was booked and completed x 1 staff member.

A staff course timeline has been created to ensure that courses will be completed within the required time frame.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of FAR Cert x 1

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response is accepted and the non-compliance is addressed.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
(e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.

Non-Compliance Information

(e) Upstairs the toilet and nappy changing facilities for the Toddlers attending Pod C were inadequate as they were blocked off and not available for use.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(e) The shelving unit has been removed and the toilet is now available for use.

This action has been added to the managers checklist, ensuring that all bathroom facilities are available to the children at all times.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence and copy of manager's checklist.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response and supporting evidence was reviewed and accepted. The non-compliance was adequately addressed.