

# Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

## Pre School

<b>TUSLA Identifier:</b>	TU2015LH049
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<b>Name of Service:</b>	Little & Big Rascals
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<b>Address of Service:</b>	Ardee Road, Dunleer, Co. Louth
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<b>Eircode:</b>	A92 E520
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<b>Name of Registered Provider:</b>	Joanne Cooney
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<b>Service type:</b>	Full Day, Sessional
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<b>Date(s) of Inspection:</b>	27/01/2026
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<b>No of pre-school children:</b>	AM	35	PM	19
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<b>Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:</b>	Early Years Inspectorate 180-189 Lakeshore Drive Airside Business Park Swords, Co Dublin
<b>Inspection undertaken by:</b>	M. McDonnell
<b>Title:</b>	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).

<b>Conditions if applicable</b>	Not Applicable
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### Description of service

Little & Big Rascals is one of several services operated by the registered provider under the Spaori trading name. The service is based in a residential area in Co. Louth, in a ground floor building with three rooms in operation. The service is registered to provide full day, part time and sessional care to children aged 2-6 years old. The service provides Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). There is an outdoor area on the premises, a kitchen area and sanitary facilities. The service operates a registered school age service.

### Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service. The registered provider employs 14 staff members. There is an area manager who provides support for the service, a person in charge who works in a supernumerary capacity and nine staff members who work directly with the children. There are two staff members who work with the afterschool children, and another staff member works in the kitchen. Three students were being provided with work experiences opportunities 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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 15 Record of a Preschool Child, Regulation 21 Equipment and materials, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of a child, Regulation 25 First aid, Regulation 27 Supervision, and Regulation 28 Insurance.

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 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.

(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.

(2) The recruitment files of the registered provider, 14 staff members and 3 students were reviewed.

(a)(b) References for staff were reviewed and were available as follows;

- Two written references were available for the registered provider.
- Two written and validated references were available for 14 staff members.
- Two written and validated references were available for the students.

(c) A Garda vetting disclosure, dated within the last three years was available for the registered provider, the 14 staff members and the 3 students.

(d) A review of the documentation available demonstrated that the registered provider, the staff members and students did not require police vetting.

(4) There was documentation available to demonstrate that the area manager, person in charge and the 9 staff members, who worked directly with the children, held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

### Non-Compliance Information

(1) (a) Whilst the inspector was informed that there was a named person to deputise this was not reflected in the roster provided to the inspector.

(b) Following discussion with the person in charge, and a review of the staff roster the inspector could not confirm that when the preschool service was in operation, the designated person in charge or a deputy person in charge was on the premises.

(c) The inspector could not confirm there was a clearly defined deputy person in charge to ensure lines of accountability. During the inspection staff named differing colleagues as the deputy person in charge. This did not always reflect the staff member named by the person in charge to the inspector. Some staff members also stated that they may contact the person in charge or the area manager should the person in charge not be on site.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) (a) The registered provider stated that the named designated deputy person in charge has been added to the roster to ensure all staff are aware of who it is when person in charge is not on the premise. This is available in the service.

(b) The registered provider stated that there is a display of person in charge and deputy person in charge posted on the staff notice board. All staff will be told who is in charge when named person is not on the premises.

(c) The registered provider stated that it has been made clear during a staff meeting who will be the deputy in charge going forward. This information will be displayed in the service.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of roster

Photograph of display board

Memo of meeting

### Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider, in their corrective and preventive action plan, has addressed the non-compliances identified on 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.*

*(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

(2) On the inspector's unannounced arrival, the adult child ratio was observed to be correct and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult-to-child ratios were observed:

- In the Toddler room there were 2 staff members and 7 children, aged 2 years and 2 months to 2 years and 7 months old attending on a sessional basis and full day care basis.
- In ECCE 1 there were 3 staff members, one whom provided additional support, and 14 children, aged 4 years and 2 months to 4 years and 1 months old attending on a sessional basis.
- In ECCE 2 there were 4 staff members, one whom provided additional support, and 14 children, aged 4 years and 2 months to 4 years and 1 months old attending on a sessional basis.
- In the afternoon the children in ECCE 1 and 2 combined and there were 15 children and 3 staff members.

(8) (a) Following a review of sign in sheets, and discussions with staff members the inspector could confirm that two staff members were always on the premises when the children were attendance in the service.

### Non-Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there was an inadequate number of adults available in the Toddler Room to facilitate the needs of the children in the same room. Whilst the ratio of adults to children was correct, the staff member was unable to provide appropriate care to children who were trying to sleep, who wanted to play or who was waiting to go home. The following was observed which demonstrated this.

One staff member was providing care to four children - two children were being settled to sleep, one child was asleep and one child was due to go home. The two children could not settle to sleep and two of the three children chose to play with noisy toys. Although the staff member tried to distract them and play with them, they were also trying to complete the sleep checks on the sleeping child. One of the children returned to the staff member who tried again to settle them for sleep. The child who was due to go home was taken by another staff member to have their nappy changed and on return to the room this child became upset. The child who was sleeping awoke at 1.20pm. A review of a sample of sleep records for this child demonstrated the child would normally sleep till 2.00 to 2.10pm.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) The registered provider has stated that whilst the minimum ratio was adhered to the safe sleep guidelines have been updated and children who don't require sleep will be moved into a different room to prevent disruption. The guidelines are on display in the room.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

Photograph up updated guidelines in the room.

### Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by th registered provider, in their corrective and preventive action plan, has addressed the non-compliances identified on inspection. These actions will be examined on the next inspection.

### 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) The registered provider ensured that a record in writing was kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service. A total sample of 12 child record forms were reviewed, to include children in attendance across all care rooms, and included the required information as detailed at (1) (a) to (h) above.

#### Non-Compliance Information

- (1) (i) One of the records for a child did not contain the parental consent for medical treatment in the event of an emergency. This practice was found to be non-compliant on the previous inspections on 15 April 2024. The corrective actions submitted following that inspection failed to prevent a recurrence of this non-compliance.

#### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

##### Corrective and Preventive Action

- (1)(i) The parental consent was gained and as a preventive action the registered provider stated that a second person will help go through registration forms to ensure all pages are attached and signed so nothings is missed.

##### Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of signed page.

## Summary Comment

The actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider, in their corrective and preventive action plan, has addressed the non-compliances identified on inspection. These actions will be examined on the next inspection.

## Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

### Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

*A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.*

### Compliance Information

Each room had a range of materials and activities to support the children's development and interests. Upon the inspector's arrival, children in the Toddler Room were playing with toys with staff members. In the ECCE 1 children were getting ready for outdoor play and in ECCE 2 children were playing board games and doing art activities. The children in each room appeared happy with the range of options available and completed these activities until they transitioned to the outdoor area, sleep or eating. Toys and games available for the children were in low level containers on shelves that were accessible to the children. Each room had a home corner with a kitchen and associated items such as play food, crockery and cutlery. There were also real-life items, such as bottles and boxes to support imaginative play. Sensory trays with sand were also readily available in rooms and they had toys such as cars, buckets and spades in them. Children could access these trays throughout their day. A low-level book self-containing a range of books were accessible to the children alongside a cosy area with a mat and cushions in each room. In the ECCE rooms children also has access to a sensory bubble tube. In one room there was specific equipment available to support a child. A staff member was able to discuss the use of the equipment and how they used these items to support the child.

Tables and chairs were available for the children in the room. At snack, dinner and play time, there were enough to accommodate all children in the room.

The staff members had outdoor boots and coats available for the children that were sourced from home. The children were observed enjoying playing running games and using the climbing frame and slide. The outdoor was sectioned into a paved, artificial grass and soft safety surface areas. Children had access to climbing equipment, slides and a playhouse. There were also scooters and trikes available. A covered area was also available. Children

were observed in this area colouring at the table and accessing the art and small play equipment that was available.

### 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 service had a secure entrance to the service with a buzzer system and locks in place. This prevented any unauthorised access to the service and exit from the service by children.
- A large playhouse in the ECCE 1 was anchored to the wall to prevent a possible risk of injury
- Blind cords were secured and were not accessible to children.
- Cleaning agents and medications were stored out of the reach of children.

##### Safe Sleep:

- Children over 2 were provided with a low bed for sleep.
- Staff members supervising the children for sleep conducted 10-minute sleep checks on the children and recorded information on a child's breathing, position and colour.
- The ambient temperature whilst children slept was maintained at 18-22°C. Staff members were aware of measures required should the temperature increase. There were documented checks in the sleep room of temperature monitoring.

#### Non-Compliance Information

##### Infection Control:

1. Children's hands were not washed before they ate on all occasions. It is acknowledged that staff in the Toddler Room were responding to children's needs and allowing them to eat their snack when they were hungry rather than at a designated time. However, the children were observed playing with toys and equipment and they did not wash their hands before they ate which increases the risk of cross contamination.
2. Whilst the nappy changing procedure was correct in most cases, there were occasions when it was insufficient in preventing the spread of infection. On two occasions the gloves needed to be replaced prior to redressing a child where heavy soiling had occurred.

### Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

#### Corrective Actions

##### Infection Control:

1. Hand washing procedure has been placed beside each sink and hand-washing policy has been updated and placed in each room.
2. A new updated procedure has been placed in changing area for all current staff and future staff to see before nappy changing.

##### Preventive Actions

The registered provider did not submit preventive actions that would give assurances that these non-compliances would not re-occur.

#### Supporting documentation submitted

##### Infection Control:

Photograph of new policies on display.

#### Summary Comment

The corrective actions submitted by the registered provider, has addressed the non-compliances identified on inspection. This regulation 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.*

*(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 trained in a First Aid Responder (FAR) course was available.

There were nine staff members with FAR certification.

(2)(a) (b)The first aid equipment was conspicuous and easily accessible to staff members. The first aid equipment available provided adequate resources in the event of a first aid emergency.

## Part VI - Safety

### Regulation 27 – Supervision

*A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.*

#### Compliance Information

The inspector observed staff supervising children primarily by sight throughout the period of inspection. The Toddler and ECCE 1 rooms which were large and open plan supported staff in being able to maintain sight of the children. ECCE 2 was an 'L' shaped room and staff were observed in various areas of the room providing constant supervision of all areas. Staff members in all rooms were observed supporting children in group and individual activities, such as reading stories, dancing games, art activities and board games. The staff members were observed responding efficiently to minor incidents between peers and in line with positive behaviour management. Children who required additional support were also provided with appropriate supervision, for example in ECCE 1 one child was provided with one-to-one learning opportunities, whilst extra outdoor play was facilitated in ECCE 2 to support peer interactions.

Staff members were aware when children, whilst in their rooms or playing outdoors were using the sanitary facilities, and ensured they used them in a timely manner and were supervised. During nappy changing the staff members were observed following the service's procedure and one child at a time was taken for changing which provided children with appropriate supervision.

Children were observed in the outdoor area, which consisted of a paved, artificial grass and soft safety surfaces. There was also a covered area where children could sit and do art activities. Staff positioned themselves throughout the area to ensure children were observed and could be supported. For example, a staff member was able to interact with children who were climbing in and out of the playhouse to ensure they did this safely.

## Part VI - Safety

### Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

#### Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that the service was adequately insured for 56 children at any one time attending for full-day care. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026