

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH049		
Name of Service:	Little & Big Rascals		
Address of Service:	Ardee Road, Dunleer, Co. Louth		
Eircode:	A92 E520		
Name of Registered Provider:	Joanne Cooney		
Service type:	Full day care		
Date of Inspection:	15/04/2024		
No of pre-school children:	AM	43	PM 19
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 and AM Coyle		
Title:	Early Years Inspectors		
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		

Description of service

Little & Big Rascals has been in operation as a privately owned early years' service since 2004. The registered provider currently operates four early years services in Co. Meath and Co. Louth, having taken over ownership of this established service in June 2022. This service is registered to accommodate a maximum of 56 pre-school children aged 2 – 6 years on a sessional and full day care basis. Eligible children are facilitated to participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme for 38 weeks each year, with starting times staggered to commence between 9.10am and 9.30am each weekday for ease of parking and to reduce traffic movement in the vicinity of the service. Little & Big Rascals is also registered to accommodate school aged children up to 12 years of age. The service is conducted from a purpose-built single-story premises located in Dunleer in Co. Louth. Three care rooms are provided on the premises, namely the Orange Room, the Blue Room and the Green Room, accessed through two separate front entrance doors and rear exits. Ancillary accommodation includes a kitchen, sanitary areas and an office. A spacious outdoor play area is provided to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider employs a manager to oversee the operational management of the service on a full-time basis. The manager works with pre-school children and school aged children in the service and has responsibility for a team of 13 staff members. Within this staffing compliment, 10 staff members including the service manager provide direct care to the pre-school children, a further 2 staff members care solely for the school aged children, 1 is employed in a full-time capacity to prepare meals and snacks and 1 is employed in a part-time capacity to clean the service outside of operational hours. Additionally, a further adult is employed when necessary in a relief capacity to cover staff absences, and students are facilitated to work under supervision in a supernumerary capacity in the service, as part of work experience placements. Two Transition Year students were present in the service on the day of inspection.

The registered provider and all 10 staff members employed to care for the pre-school children in the service hold appropriate early childhood care and education qualifications.

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 regulations 9, 11, 15, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26 and 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the registered provider, person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and

(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 service manager was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person appointed to deputise as required.

(b) The service manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced at 9.15am on the day of inspection. The service manager was present in the service for the duration of the inspection while the registered provider arrived on the premises shortly after the inspection commenced and was also present throughout the inspection.

All staff files were reviewed. These consisted of 15 files which were maintained in respect of the registered provider, 11 staff members employed to care for pre-school children in the service or who attend occasionally in a relief capacity, 2 staff members who work with the school aged children and for the staff member who engages in

cooking and catering duties. Furthermore, the files maintained for the 2 Transition Year students who were present in the service on the day of inspection were reviewed, both of whom were aged less than 18 years.

(2)(a)(b) There were 2 written, validated references available for the 13 of the 15 adults and for the 2 students whose files were reviewed.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 15 adults in the service. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International police vetting was available as required for 1 adult who had lived outside the State as an adult for more than 6 consecutive months.

(4) The registered provider and all 10 staff members who worked directly with the pre-school children in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 - 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) or 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).

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b) Three statements of employment rather than written, validated references were provided for 2 staff members. These documents contained no details apart from the staff members names and dates of previous employment within organisations but did not outline any personal attributes or information regarding the employees' suitability for employment. There was no evidence that these documents had been validated with the sources. Additionally, a written reference provided from a past employer for one of these 2 staff members had not been validated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

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

Corrective Action

(2)(a)(b) The service requested and received two references for the staff mentioned. These have been verified. The other reference was validated on 19/04/2024 by the Manager.

Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b) A new staff checklist has been compiled for the Managers in each service to use for new staff employed. On this, Managers are required to have 2 written references on file and verified. During a recent Managers

meeting it has been highlighted that statements of employment are not sufficient for staff files. All files have been reviewed.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Copies of the outstanding written, validated references were submitted to the Inspectorate.
- Copy of the service's staff checklist.

Summary Comment

The inspectors reviewed the corrective actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider following the inspection. The registered provider demonstrated that the non-compliance identified under Regulation 9(2)(a)(b) has been adequately addressed.

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.

particular reference number 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 on the day of inspection and remained so throughout the inspection.

The following adult to child ratios were observed when the highest numbers of children were present in each care room during the inspection:

- In the Orange Room there were 11 children aged 3 years 8 months to 5 years 4 months being cared for by 1 staff member, with the service manager also present in this room for most of the morning covering another staff member's unexpected absence. Seven of the 11 children were attending the service on a sessional basis on the day of inspection. In addition, a Transition Year student was present in this room on the day of inspection, being facilitated to work under supervision in a supernumerary capacity, undertaking a work experience placement.
- In the Green Room there were 16 children aged 3 years 1 month to 5 years 1 month being cared for by 2 staff members. Twelve of the 16 children were attending the service on a sessional basis on the day of inspection. In addition, a Transition Year student was present in this room on the day of inspection, being facilitated to work under supervision in a supernumerary capacity, undertaking a work experience placement.
- In Blue Room 1 there were 16 children aged 3 years to 4 years 2 months being cared for by 4 staff members with twelve of the children attending on a sessional basis. One staff member was employed in the service to reduce the adult to child ratio, and when necessary, to work with children with additional needs, in a post funded by the Minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model scheme.

The service manager provided relief and support to the children and staff members in the care rooms during the inspection as well as collecting school aged children from primary school during the afternoon.

(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.*
- (3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child but only in respect of the record relating to that child,*
 - (b) an employee who is authorised in that behalf by the registered provider, and*
 - (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) A sampling process was used in relation to the children's records. Ten of the 19 sampled registration forms were appropriately completed with the required information as specified in sub-sections (a) to (i) in this regulation.

(3) The children's records were available and open for review by the inspectors as authorised persons.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(i) Written parental consent was not provided on 9 of the 19 sampled registration forms to authorise staff members avail of appropriate medical treatment for these children in the event of an emergency.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective action and preventive action have been carried out:

Corrective Action

Parents have been given the medical consent page that was missing from their child's enrolment form. These have been signed by parents.

Preventive Action

New parent packs for new children attending the service containing all pages have been printed. New parent packs are now on file and on Managers desk tops to ensure this does not happen again.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Copies of appropriately completed forms containing the required information were submitted to the Inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The inspectors reviewed the corrective actions and evidence submitted by the registered provider following the inspection. The registered provider demonstrated that the non-compliance identified under Regulation 15(1)(i) has been adequately addressed.

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 are examples of how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the service:

Basic needs:

- On the inspectors' arrival to the service and throughout the inspection, the children attending the 3 care rooms were engaged in meaningful play-based activities. The staff members were present and joining in as play partners with the children, providing encouraging and nurturing interactions to children and supporting them to locate and set up materials to extend their play. Children appeared comfortable and confident to make choices about their learning, and the staff members were responsive to the children's ideas and requests.

- Breakfast of cereal and toast is available to children attending the service on a full day care basis. All children attending the service bring their morning snack with them from home. Dinner is cooked in the onsite kitchen each day with fish fingers, chips and green beans served on the day of inspection. Mealtimes were observed to be a social and pleasant experience with staff sitting with the children while they ate, chatting and encouraging conversation with the children. Children's water bottles were accessible to them on low level shelving in the 3 care rooms to enable them to take a drink as they desired throughout the day.
- Children were encouraged and supported to use the toilet independently with discreet support and assistance provided as required. Nappy changing occurred regularly, and promptly when needed.
- None of the children present on the day of inspection required sleep, however stackable beds were available in the service should a child need to sleep. Comfortable rest areas were provided in the care rooms should any of the children choose to opt out of activities at any time.
- The layout of the care rooms enabled the children to move around the spaces freely and access the available play materials. The wall displays in the care rooms including family pictures and birthday walls evidenced the value the service placed on the children's home life and helped to reinforce the relationships between the service and the children's families.
- Throughout the care rooms in the service the staff members were observed to be sensitive and responsive in promoting positive behaviours. When minor disputes arose in the care rooms the staff members supported the children to find positive solutions.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The staff members in the 3 care rooms in the service were observed to be consistent in their interactions with the children, providing regular praise and encouragement, asking open ended questions thereby giving the children the opportunity to express their thinking and feelings, and ensuring that each child in the session was happy and engaged in activity. Children were spoken about with positivity, and the staff members demonstrated awareness and understanding about children who needed additional help and support to participate in their pre-school experience in a meaningful way.
- There was a consistency of staff provision in the service, the staff and children were very familiar with each other, and the children were observed to seek out staff for comfort and support as they required it. Staff members were observed supporting children to interact positively with each other, helping children

to develop social relationships with their peers and to diffuse any minor disputes that arose between the children.

- In the 3 care rooms the staff members were observed to work well together as a team, the staff members supported each other in the care of the children modelling positive ways of interacting with the children and one another.
- A key work system was in place in the care rooms, staff members informed the inspector that each staff member takes responsibility for carrying out regular observations of a specific group of children and in turn use the observations to plan the children's care.

Physical and material environment:

- Throughout the care rooms the play materials and equipment were displayed and readily accessible on low level shelving to promote the children's choice and independence when selecting their play activities. The children in the care rooms demonstrated familiarity with their environment to access the toys and play resources they chose to play with.
- In all 3 care rooms areas of interest were developed including well-resourced home areas with play crockery, cooking utensils, dress up materials, hair care resources, dolls and baby care items, all of which encouraged and enabled the children's imaginary play experiences. Additionally, construction resources, transport toys, arts and crafts materials and a wide range of tabletop resources including jigsaws were available. The service valued the provision of sensory play experiences which was evidenced through the provision of sand and water trays in each of the 3 care rooms.
- The children's artwork was valued and displayed on the walls of the care rooms and the children's language development was enhanced through the provision of a wide range of books.
- A Sensory room in the outdoor play area facilitated children individually or in small groups to benefit from a calm quiet space.
- An enclosed outdoor area was provided to the rear of the service. The area immediately outside the back door of the premises was covered with rigid plastic roofing, tables and chairs were provided along with a range of tabletop resources and art materials which facilitated the children in tabletop activities outside. A well-resourced mud kitchen with a range of additional play materials was located beneath a rigid plastic roof to enable the children to access the area regardless of the weather. A large ground level sandpit was available with a range of spades, shovels and toys for the children to enjoy. A large wooden shed was converted to a shop to allow the children to extend their imaginary play experiences alongside

table and chairs for the children to sit at. The children's gross motor play was enhanced through the provision of a wooden climbing frame and slide, 2 additional slides, a dome climbing frame, a ground level tunnel and balance boards. The area provided the children with space for free movement and to use the wide variety of ride on toys that were available. All of the children present on the day of inspection enjoyed time in the outdoor play area.

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 doors leading into the premises were appropriately secured to prevent the children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.
- The warm water temperature in the sanitary accommodation did not exceed the recommended maximum water temperature of 43°C which reduced the risk of scalding for the children.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely on high shelving out of reach of children.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to children on the day of inspection.
- Apart from the non-compliance detailed below in respect of one roller blind, the remaining blind cords were appropriately secured.

Infection Control:

- Perishable items supplied by parents and guardians for the children's morning snack were refrigerated.
- Children were facilitated to wash their hands before eating, after using the toilet, and after outdoor and messy play.
- Thermostatically controlled running warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were provided at the wash hand basins in the sanitary accommodation of the service.
- Disposable aprons were and suitable disposable gloves were available for nappy changing procedures.
- Pedal operated lidded nappy bins were provided for the disposal of nappies which reduced the risk of cross-infection.

- The outdoor sand pit was fitted with a secure lid to prevent contamination by animals and birds.

Administration of Medication:

- Medications were stored out of the reach of children. Child-specific care plans were in place for 2 children in attendance who were prescribed inhalers. No children were observed having medication administered on the day of inspection.

Safe Sleep:

- A number of 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.

Fire Safety:

- The designated emergency exit doors were clear and unobstructed.

Outings:

- The service manager stated that outings are not undertaken with the pre-school children from the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The cord on a roller blind in the Green Room was not appropriately secured. This blind was attached to the wall and sometimes used as a drape over the cosy area. The blind cord was observed loosely sitting in a small wall-mounted basket beside the blind which could potentially be accessible to a pre-school child if they stood on the low-level window sill and wooden storage unit beneath. This posed a safety risk for the children in attendance.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The registered provider stated the following corrective action and preventive action have been carried out:

Corrective Action

1. The cord on blind has been cut off as it is not in use in the service.

Preventive Action

1. A staff member has been appointed in the service to do health and safety checks, using a maintenance form that is completed once a month to ensure all equipment and materials are safe and in good working order.

Summary Comment

The inspectors reviewed the corrective action submitted by the registered provider following the inspection. The registered provider demonstrated that the non-compliance identified under Regulation 23 has 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 in attendance records in each care room noting each child's arrival and departure time on a daily basis.
- (3)(a)(b) A system was in place to ensure that no person other than the children and their parents or guardians, employees, approved students or authorised visitors could enter the service. A visitor's book was maintained and on arrival to the service on the day of inspection the inspectors were requested to record their attendance on the premises and the purpose of their 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) Seven staff members 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) and (b) The first aid boxes were suitably equipped and safely stored in readily accessible positions on the premises, out of the reach of children.

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 20/03/2024.
- (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 27/07/2023 and the smoke detection system on 13/04/2024.

(4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the care rooms and communal spaces 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 56 children attending the service on a full day care basis. The policy showed that the service was insured until 27/03/2025.