

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH056
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Name of Service:	Little Partners Creche Ltd
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Address of Service:	Unit 3, Partnership Court, Park Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 CY50
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Name of Registered Provider:	Ciaran Reid
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	18/09/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	39	PM	33
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Child Wellbeing Centre, Castleblayney Co. Monaghan
Inspection undertaken by:	M. Flood and S. Skinnader
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
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Description of service

Little Partners Crèche Ltd have been operating as a community based childcare service since 1998. This not-for-profit service participates in the Community Childcare Subvention Programme and provides full day care, part-time and sessional education and care to pre-school children aged from 1 to 6 years of age. The service operates from 08:30 to 17:30 each weekday and the setting caters for a maximum of 56 children.

The service operates from 2 storey facility located in a residential/ business area in Dundalk, Co. Louth. Following recent developments, the service now has 5 care rooms in operation namely: The Waddler Room, The Toddler Room and Pre-School Rooms 1 which are located on the ground floor and Preschool Rooms 2 and 3 that are located on the 1st floor. A separate sleep room and Sensory Room are also provided. The service has two enclosed outdoor play areas one of which is adjoining the Waddler Room and Preschool Room 1 and the second area is located off the Toddler Room.

Staffing

There are 28 staff employed in this service, 24 of whom work directly with the children including the service's manager and deputy manager and supervisor. Four staff members are employed to carry out administrative, catering and housekeeping duties.

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.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16 and regulation 19. As a result, the scope of the inspection included The Waddler and Toddler Rooms and Preschool Rooms 2 & 3.

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 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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 and supervisor was on the premises when the inspectors arrived at the premises and were present throughout the inspection.

(c) When questioned staff were familiar with the management structure within the service and the roles and responsibilities of the various staff members.

(2) Twenty-eight staff files were presented for inspection and reviewed:

(a) & (b)

- There were 2 written references from a past employer or an alternative source available for all 28 members of staff.
- Forty out of the 56 written references available were validated as required.

(c) A processed Garda Vetting Disclosure was available for 28 members of staff. 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.

(d) International police vetting was available for 4 staff who had resided outside the Irish jurisdiction for a period of 6 months or more as an adult.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 21 out of 24 members of staff who works directly with the children held at least the minimum required level 5 childcare qualification on the National Framework of Childcare Qualifications or a qualification deemed equivalent.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

1. Insufficient evidence was available to determine that 16 out of 56 references were validated prior to staff commencing in the service.

(d)

2. Documentary evidence was not available for one staff member who required international police vetting.

(3)

3. Sufficient evidence was not available to demonstrate to the inspectorate that appropriate vetting procedures in relation to the validation of written references, and obtaining international police vetting where required, had been carried prior to staff being appointed in the service.

(4)

4. Insufficient documentary evidence was available for 3 staff members to assure the inspectorate that they held the minimum required level 5 childcare qualification or a qualification deemed to be equivalent by the Minister.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b)

All references have been verified signed and dated. The registered provider has stated that one of the references could not be verified. The telephone reference checklist has been updated to ensure that the content is verified, signed and dated. The registered provider also updated the induction booklet to ensure all references are validated, signed and dated.

(d).

2. The registered provider has the required police vetting for one staff member.

A checklist has been created to ensure that no police vetting, or international vetting is missed. CVs have also been updated to include the online courses for printed certificates.

(3)

3. A checklist has been created to ensure that no police vetting or international vetting is missed. CVs have also been updated to include the online courses for printed certificates.

(4)

4. The registered provider has printed the qualifications from a recognised learning source for 2 members of staff.

The other staff member only has certain components on her training certificate so a new one has been requested, by the registered provider who states that the employee has completed childcare modules. A printed hard copy of the qualification list is now available for future reference.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A copy of reference validation/ checklist template.
- Police vetting for 1 staff member
- A copy of qualification recognition for 2 staff members

Summary Comment

The registered provider submitted details of the corrective and preventative actions taken in the service to address the non-compliances. Based on the information submitted and the assurances given that there is a robust validation system in place the non-compliances identified under Regulation (9)(2)(a), (b) & (d) and (3) have been addressed.

While a qualification recognition has been submitted for 2 staff members, insufficient documentary evidence has been submitted to determine that the qualification certificate for 1 staff member meets the minimum required level 5 childcare qualification or a qualification deemed to be equivalent by the Minister. Therefore Regulation 9 (4) has not been adequately addressed and remains non-compliant.

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) During the inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) When the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service there were 5 rooms in operation, namely; The Waddler Room, Toddler Room and Preschool Rooms 1, 2 & 3.

The following adult: child ratios were observed:

- Two staff in Preschool Room 1 with 8 preschool children aged 2-3 years.
- Two staff in The Waddler Room with 5 preschool children aged 1-2 years.
- Five staff in The Toddler Room with 12 preschool children aged 2 years.
- Two staff in Preschool Room 2 with 7 preschool children aged 2 and 11 months - 4 years.

- Two staff in Preschool Room 3 with 7 preschool children aged 2 and 9 months - 4 years.

There were 3 additional members of staff present including the deputy manager, the supervisor who was carrying out catering duties and one staff member who was engaged in administrative duties.

(8)(a) Following a review of the available documentation e.g., staff rotas and children's attendance records the information demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that there were at least 2 adults on the premises at all times.

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;
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(h) Documentary evidence was available of the daily attendance of each child in the service and included the arrival and departure times of each child. This information was recorded on the services record and communication tablet.

(i) Up to date daily/ weekly staff rosters were available in the service and were reflective of the staff present in the service.

(k) A sample of 25 accident and incident forms were reviewed. The information contained on the forms included staff and parental signatures.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(k) Eighteen of the accident incident forms reviewed did not contain a manager's signature to indicate that they had been informed and reviewed the incident.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1)(k) All accident/incident books are signed and up to date.

Email sent to all staff issuing a reminder that when an accident/incident occurs the manager/supervisor must be called to sign the book before the child goes home.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A copy of updated Accident and Incident Policy

Summary Comment

The registered provider submitted details of the corrective and preventative actions taken in the service to address the non-compliance. Based on the information submitted the non-compliance identified under Regulation 16 has been adequately addressed. This will be reviewed 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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

There were 5 rooms in operation on the day of inspection namely the Toddler Room, Waddler Room and Preschool Rooms 1, 2 & 3. A sampling process was used and as such The Toddler Room, Waddler Room and Preschool Rooms 2 & 3 are the subject of this assessment.

(1)(a) The following examples demonstrate how the registered provider ensured that children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the service:

Basic needs:

- The children from all rooms had free movement in the care rooms and had a change of environment the outside areas.

- A weekly menu was available and was on display. All snacks, lunches and dinners are provided by the service for the children attending on a sessional, part-time and full day care basis. The hot meal is supplied by an external catering company and reheated by the catering staff on the premises. The hot meal observed during the inspection was observed to consist of 'Irish Stew' and mashed potato. A variety of fresh fruit and snacks are also provided. The dinners were of an age-appropriate consistency and portion sizes were adequate in the various rooms. The deputy manager confirmed to the inspectors that the staff were liaising with parents in relation to children who were experiencing difficulties with food at mealtimes.

The children had access to drinks of water or milk. Jugs of water were available in the rooms. Some of the children attending the Waddler Room had bottles of cow's milk which were supplied by the parents and were stored appropriately in the fridge. Staff sat with the children while they were eating and provided assistance as required while also supporting independence. The children were afforded plenty of time to finish their food.

- All children who were toilet trained were encouraged to be independent with toileting and step ups were provided. Discreet supervision was also provided by staff as required for the children who were brought out to the sanitary accommodation outside the care room. Gentle handwashing reminders were given to the children after toileting.
- Nappies were checked and changed on a regular basis with pleasant interactions between staff and children observed.
- Handwashing was encouraged after being outside and before lunchtime in the Waddler and Preschool rooms. Attention was given to personal care in all rooms such as nose blowing and wiping faces and hands after dinner and snack time. "Self-care areas" were accessible to the children in Preschool Rooms 2 and 3 and were observed in use.
- In the Waddler and Toddler Rooms child-led sleep needs were facilitated in the service. The staff followed the children's routines and were also alert to signs of tiredness displayed by the children. Children were observed sleeping at various intervals in the sleep room and care rooms.

Supporting Relationships

- The staff were observed to interact with the children in a warm and supportive manner. Soft tones, positive and respectful language were observed in interactions between the children and staff members

e.g. “well done....good girl...mind the step getting down..” “...what did you have for breakfast?....orange.....wow”.

- A key worker system was in place throughout the service and the names of the children, and their key worker was on display in the care rooms. The staff when questioned were familiar with their allocated key children and this promoted the development and sustainment of relationships between the children, their parents, and the staff in the service.
- The staff were observed to use an electronic application (an ‘App’) to provide information to parents on their child’s care and daily routine in the service. Information shared included details of each child’s personal care routines such as what they ate, when they slept, nappy changes and play activities. The staff also reported that communication with parents is conducted verbally at collection and drop off, by email and there was a parents notice boards with information in the hallway. A communication book is also use in some of the care rooms for information sharing about the children’s daily needs, appointments or collection information. Learning journals had been commenced for the children in the Preschool Rooms.
- Individual plans were commenced, or referrals were in progress for children who required additional supports in the service.

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.

(3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-

(a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises, or

Compliance Information

(1)(b) The preschool children have access to adequate and suitable rest and sleep facilities. The following were observed in use during the inspection:

- The children have access to a soft /rest area which is located within each of the playrooms and consists of soft seating, mats and cushions.
- A separate sleep room is located on the ground floor and contains 4 standard cots for children under 2 years to access for sleep as required.

- Stackable day beds were observed in use for children aged over 2 years when they required them.
- A separate sensory room was available in the service. The room was observed in use during the inspection by staff to support children with self-regulation and to provide a calming environment. The room had a variety of soft mats and shaped cushions, sensory lighting, 'bubble lamps' and a variety of ceiling suspended stars and shapes. Shaped balls and wall mounted mirrors and gadget boards were also provided.

(3)(a)

- The children were observed to access the two enclosed outdoor play areas on the premises. Both areas are accessed on a rotational basis and are partially covered for use in all types of weather. The areas are well resourced and contain a range of age-appropriate toys and equipment. For example;
- **Area one** which is adjacent to the Toddler Room and is accessed by the children attending this room and Preschool rooms 2 & 3. The area is enclosed and securely fenced with a safety surface. A variety of specific areas of interest are available including a mud kitchen, a construction area with stones and digging toys, a climbing frame and balance beam for gross motor play and development. A variety of ride-on and mobility toys were also available.
- **Area 2** is located off Preschool Room 1 and the Waddler room and is accessed by the children attending these rooms. The area had a safety surface and was gated and fenced. Equipment in the area included a large wooden boat with slide, sand tray, mud kitchen, ride on toys and balance bikes, rockers and push toys.

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.

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. The hot water at one of the sinks in the Toddler Room nappy change area, was too hot and was recorded at 49.1°C. This exceeds the safety guidelines that recommends thermostatically controlled hot water to a maximum of 43°C.

2. There were unprotected sharp corners on low level shelving units, the work top and a table in Preschool Room 2. These are a potential injury hazard.
3. In Preschool Room 2 there was a trailing charging lead accessible to the children. This is a health and safety risk.

Infection Control:

4. Inadequate hand washing practices were observed. For example: one staff member did not wash their hands or the child's hands after nappy changes were carried out. In the Toddler Room the children's hands were not washed on return from outdoor play and the children were observed to recommence playing with the box of musical instruments.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. The hot tap has now been reduced to the correct temperature.
A new temperature check list has been posted for staff to check the water mornings and afternoons.
2. The corners are now protected with plastic corner covers. The monthly checklist has now been amended to check that corner covers are intact.
3. The trailing lead is now secured with a cable tie to prevent children from reaching it.
This has also been added to the monthly checklist to ensure trailing cables are intact.

Infection Control:

4. The registered provider has spoken to all the staff and issued an email regarding the nappy changing policy. Extra reminders have now been posted in the nappy changing area.
The registered provider will do spot-checks to ensure hands are washed in the classroom and in the nappy changing area.

Supporting documentation submitted

- A copy of hot water temperature records which are within best practice safety guidelines.
- Amended checklist
- Photographic evidence of secured leads and cables.
- Updated Nappy Changing Policy
- A copy of Handwashing poster and hand hygiene policy.

Summary Comment

The registered provider submitted details of the corrective and preventative actions taken in the service to address the non-compliances together with supporting information. Based on the information submitted the non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed. The implementation and sustainment of the corrective and preventative actions detailed will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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 firefighting 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 all fire drills which had been completed in the service on a monthly basis.
- (b) A record was kept of the number, type and maintenance of the fire-fighting equipment dated 12/8/25 and 8/8/25 respectively.
- (4) Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were conspicuously displayed in the premises.