

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH080
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Name of Service:	Realt na Mara Preschool and Afterschool Club
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Address of Service:	The Cabin, Grounds of Realt na Mara NS, Mill Street, Dundalk, Co. Louth
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Eircode:	A91 TD3H
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Name of Registered Provider:	Anita Hanratty
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	27/03/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	-
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	No.18 The Grange Plantation Rd Monaghan
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Skinnader
Title:	Early Years Inspector

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	Not Applicable.
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Description of service

Realt na Mara Preschool and Afterschool Club has been operating as a private run childcare service since 2009. The service provides a sessional service to pre-school children aged 3 – 6 years. The service operates from 08:00 - 12:30hrs each weekday and caters for a maximum of 22 pre-school children.

The service is conducted from a prefabricated building in the grounds of Realt na Mara Primary school in Dundalk Co. Louth. The service currently has 1 care room, sanitary facilities and a sectioned off kitchen area. The children have access to an outdoor area on the school grounds.

Staffing

There were 3 staff members and 1 student employed 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/ 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 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,*

(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 a system in place to designate a named deputy person to deputise as required. The person in charge was on the premises when the inspector arrived unannounced to the service.

There were 3 staff and 1 student files reviewed at inspection.

(2)(a) & (b)

- There were 2 written and validated references from a past employer or an alternative source available for all 3 members of staff.
- There were 2 written references for the student.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all 3 staff members and the student. The service had 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) Not applicable following a review of the staff files presented on the day of inspection, international police vetting was not required as none of the staff members had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of greater than 6 months as an adult.

(4) The three staff who worked directly with the preschool children had documentary evidence of a childcare qualification of at least a minimum Level 5 qualification. A qualification was not required for the student.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a) The 2 written references for the student were not validated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a) The two written references have now been verbally validated.

The registered provider has a tick-box check list for students for what requirements are needed before they commence work in the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

Evidence of validation x 2 of the references.

Summary Comment

The registered provider's response is accepted and the non-compliance has been 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.*
- (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) On the day of inspection there were an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the early years' service.

(3) The adult to child ratios were correct.

In the Preschool Room there were 19 children aged between 3 years and 6 months – 4 years being cared for by 3 staff.

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 was one care room in operation on the day of the inspection - the Cabin.

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

Basic Needs:

- The children had free movement in the care room and had a change of environment to the outside area. The children were dressed appropriately to go outside.
- The service provided a daily snack consisting of different chopped fruits which was given prior to the children commencing their lunches. Lunches were provided by the parents. The lunches were observed to consist of a variety of items including yoghurts, rolls, fruit, sandwiches and drinks.
- The children were given plenty of time to eat their lunches. Three children were not rushed to finish when their peers had finished their lunches, they were then assisted to tidy up once finished.
- A jug of water and cups was available in the care room and the children also had access to their own drinks.
- All children who were toilet trained were encouraged to be independent with toileting. Discreet supervision was also provided by staff as required.

Supporting relationships:

- The staff members in the service 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 children
- Communication between the parents and staff was informal at drop off and pick-up. The staff also confirmed that an electronic application (app) was used to communicate and to share information with parents.
- Transitions between activities were smooth and the children were observed to enjoy trying not to “waken the sleeping teddy bear” in the room when getting ready to go outside.

Physical and Material Environment

- A variety of age-appropriate toys and equipment were available in the care room on low level shelving which promoted independence and facilitated choice for the children.
- There were resourced defined interest areas such as the home corner, messy area with sand, art supplies and painting easel, role play area and a small shop front, a construction/ work bench area, books and push and pull toys. Staff reported that toys were rotated out of a storage cupboard regularly and also used to allow for cleaning of toys which were in use.

Programme Of Activities.

- Evidence of planning and recorded observations were on the wall and also recorded in staff notebooks.
- Artwork in relation to the “Mother’s Day “theme was on display.

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,

(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

Compliance Information

(1)(a) There was a large leather covered sofa in the cosy area. In addition, there were 2 plastic covered foam mats and 2 padded seated units in the room. These were available for the children to relax on or take a rest from activities if they so wished.

(2)(a) There was an outdoor area directly outside the door of the service to which the children had access. There was a large enclosed tarmacked area. The area contained a wooden house, sand tray, a wooden tepee, bench and large boat. There was a “bug garden”, planter, hexagonal seating / balancing frame, tray with peat and farm animals plus balls to play with.

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

The Inspectorate is assured that in general adequate steps have been taken to ensure the health, safety and welfare of the pre-school children attending the service, for example the following observations were made during the inspection:

General Safety:

- The external outdoor play area was secured and gated.
- The entrance 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.
- Cleaning agents were stored up high safely out of the reach of children.
- Radiators were turned off and cool to touch. Evidence of 4 morning surface temperature checks while the radiators are on in the morning was on display on the daily "Radiator Temperature" record sheet.

Infection Control:

- There was a constant supply of thermostatically controlled hot water, liquid soap and paper towels.
- Hands were washed routinely after outdoor play, before lunch and after morning play. Staff also reported the use of hand sanitiser on arrival at the service in the morning.
- Lunches were observed to be appropriately stored in the fridge.
- Tabletops were observed to be sprayed and cleaned after use.
- Cleaning equipment was safely stored in the outside shed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

Evidence of adequate insurance was available to provide cover for up to 28 children and dated to 27/3/25.