

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LH105			
Name of Service:	Toddlers' Hill Creche & Montessori			
Address of Service:	54 Moorehall Rise, Ardee, Co. Louth			
Eircode:	A92 Y958			
Name of Registered Provider:	Jeanne Thorne			
Service type:	Full Day			
Date of Inspection:	13/08/2025			
No of pre-school children:	AM	40	PM	38
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Hampton Court, Cootehill Road, Drumalee, Co Cavan. H12 YY84			
Inspection undertaken by:	S Mc Kenna A 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

Toddlers Hill Creche and Montessori is a privately operated service, located in Ardee Co. Louth, in operation since 2008. The childcare service provides full day care, part-time day care and a sessional service to a maximum of 60 children aged 0 to 6 years and operates from 7.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The service is facilitated from a two-storey adapted dwelling. There are five care rooms named; Baby room, Toddler room, Kinders room, Preschool room, Montessori room. The Baby room was not in use on the day of inspection.

Additional facilities include a kitchen, office, staff room, a cot room and sanitary facilities. Outdoor play areas were provided. Car parking is available to the front of the premises.

Staffing

There are eighteen staff employed in the service including the registered provider, a manager, two deputy managers, a supervisor and 11 staff that work directly with the children.

A cook and a kitchen assistant/cleaner are also employed.

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.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 9 Management & Recruitment, Regulation 11 Staffing Levels, Regulation 19 Health, Welfare & Development of Child, Regulation 20 Facilities for rest and play, Regulation 22 Food and drink, Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child, Regulation 25 First Aid, Regulation 26 Fire Safety Measures, Regulation 28 Insurance and Regulation 29 Premises.

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, manager, deputy manager, 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) The service had a designated person in charge, who is the registered provider and named persons to deputise in their absence.

(b) Following discussion with the registered provider, it was confirmed that when the preschool service was in operation the designated person in charge or the named person in charge was on the premises.

(c) A management structure is in place, which was clearly identifiable through review of the staff roster, a staff display board and through discussion with the staff team.

(2) The files for 18 staff were reviewed.

(a) (b) Two written and validated references were on file for 18 adults.

A total of 18 written and validated references from a previous employer were on file.

A total of 18 written and validated references from a reputable source were on file.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for 18 staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all employed staff.

(d) A review of the employment history for 18 staff, demonstrated that 4 adults had lived outside the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months. The required police vetting for 3 staff was available on file.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 15 staff employed to work with children, held an appropriate childcare qualification at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications, or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. A qualification for the cook, kitchen assistant and the administration person was not required.

Non-Compliance Information

(9) (2) (d)

A disclosure for one staff member who had resided outside of the state for a period of 6 months or more as an adult was on file. This staff member was recruited since 2012, whereby an International Child Protection Certificate is the regulatory requirement.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The employee immediately applied for the correct police vetting – The International Child Protection Certificate. Our Personnel File Check list was updated to include the name of the certificate needed so that when it is being checked it can be referenced. Registered provider, Manager, Deputy Manager and administration staff were informed of this requirement. Management will conduct regular audits on all staff files.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of International Child Protection Certificate received.

Copy of updated personnel checklist.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has adequately addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 9 (2) (d).

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) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) The adult to child ratios were correct in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. The following adult to child ratios were observed:

Two adults cared for 7 children aged 1 year 1 months to 1 year 8 months in the Toddler room, all of whom attended on a part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 10 children aged 1 year 8 months to 3 years 1 month in the Kinder room, all of whom attended on a part time or full day care basis.

One adult cared for 8 children aged 3 years 2 months to 3 years 11 months in Preschool room, all of whom attended on a part time or full day care basis.

Two adults cared for 15 children aged 3 years 6 months to 5 years 4 months in Montessori room, all of whom attended on a part time or full day care basis.

In addition to the above, the deputy manager assisted throughout the care rooms during the inspection.

The registered provider and manager arrived on site following the inspectors arrival and remained onsite for the duration of the inspection. The manager helped in care rooms where needed.

(8) A review of the staff roster demonstrated that the registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present on the premises at all times while children were in attendance.

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

The following examples demonstrate how children's learning, development and well-being was facilitated in the service:

Basic Needs

Meal times were observed to be relaxed, with opportunities for conversation observed between staff and children. Younger children that needed support at meal times were helped by the staff.

Older children were observed to use the toilet independently with staff providing supports where needed.

Younger children had their nappies changed in line with their daily routine. Conversations were observed between staff and children at this time, and a child who appeared to become upset was comforted and reassured by staff.

Children's appearances were cared for through the cleaning of noses, and use of bibs for younger children at meal times. Where younger children's clothes became soiled, they were observed to be changed promptly.

The children attending the Toddler, Kinder and Preschool room availed of a sleep after their dinner. The staff were observed to transition children into the care rooms (Toddler and Baby rooms) that had been turned into sleep rooms and provided a relaxing environment for them to rest and sleep.

The children in all care rooms experienced a change of environment on the day of inspection and played in the outdoor areas at designated times.

Supporting Relationships

The atmosphere upon the inspectors arrival to the care rooms was warm and welcoming. The children were observed to be engaged in preparing for their morning snack time and taking part in circle time activities.

The interactions among staff and children were observed to be positive, with the staff sitting down at the child's level when providing direct care and supports when needed.

The staff advised the inspectors that the children had been in the process of transitioning to their new care rooms, and the children were observed to play contently in their new environments and interacted confidently with their peers and the staff who cared for them.

The staff acted as positive role models for the children and used gentle encouragement for children to be mindful of other children's feelings such as taking turns with toys. The staff were observed to promote positive behaviour, with praise given for positive behaviour interactions.

Communication with parents is upon arrival and collection times, where parents arrive directly into the care rooms to collect their children. A digital application is also used to record the child's sleeping, eating, toileting and daily activities which is shared with the parents.

The staff team were observed to communicate effectively and work well together, with transitions carried out smoothly such as preparing the children for sleep times, and outdoor times.

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-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day

(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

Compliance Information

(1)(a) With regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors. Each care room was well resourced with defined interest areas, with equipment and play materials available suitable for the age and stage of development of the children attending each room.

(b) There were adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day;

- A cot room with 6 cots was provided for children aged under 2 years. Individual bed sheets and cellular blankets were in use and laundered weekly, or more often if required.
- Following dinner time, the Toddler room and Baby room were set up with floor beds for children who required a sleep;
 - Children aged 1 year and 8 months to 1 year 10 months were observed to sleep on toddler floor beds fitted with suitable mattresses.
 - Children aged over 2 years were observed to sleep on stackable beds.
- Rest areas were provided in each of the care rooms to include soft child size seating with soft mats and cushions where children could rest and relax during their day.

(3) (a)

There were two outdoor areas provided in the service, one located to the front of the service and one to the rear of the service. The outdoor area to the front of the pre-school was gated and fenced and had surfaces of grass, paving stones and bark and contained a sand area and a wooden bus. The area to the rear of the service which is accessed directly from the Toddler and Kinder rooms was surfaced with safety tiles. A playhouse, a slide and a variety of ride on and push along toys were provided for the children to use. The area was further divided into a section with mud kitchens and a water source that facilitated the children in participating in water play. The two outdoor play spaces available to the children provided opportunities for free movement.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service provides all breakfast, snacks and meals to children in attendance. A copy of a 4-week rolling menu is available and on display, which detailed all food options prepared and cooked onsite by the cook. The snacks and meals listed on the menu, taking into consideration the age of children and the times they are present, were suitable, nutritious and a varied choice was available.

Meals are adjusted to suit younger children and babies needs where required.

Cereal is provided in the morning, and a snack of fresh chopped fruit, vegetables and bread sticks was served at 10 -10.30am. A hot meal of chicken pasta bake with cheese was served between 12 – 12.30pm, and an afternoon

snack of pittas with tuna and sweetcorn was scheduled for 3pm. A fruit box is kept in each care room where children can avail of a fruit snack during their day. The cook confirmed that extra portions or other options of food is also available where needed. Snacks and meals are prepared in line with children's dietary requirements. Children's drinks were provided in each care room, and available to the children throughout their day.

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 registered provider ensured all reasonable measures were put in place to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of children attending such as:

General Safety:

The premises were appropriately secured to prevent a child from exiting unsupervised and to restrict unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises.

- A visitor log was maintained, and inspectors were requested to sign in and out upon arrival and departure.
- The outdoor areas were secured, and no hazards were observed.
- The play equipment and toys used by the children were observed in good repair.
- Risk assessments were available for review for indoor and outdoor areas and completed up to date.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the children.
- Storage areas remained secure and were inaccessible to the children.
- Window restrictors were secured on the windows on the first floor of the service.
- Blind cords were secured.
- Handrails on the stairway were suitable for children.
- Floor coverings throughout the service were maintained in good repair.
- Cleaning agents were observed to be stored out of children's reach.
- The children were adequately supervised during the inspection.

The inspectors observed the following infection control measures in practice within the service:

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled running water, liquid soap, paper towels and foot operated bins were provided for hand washing purposes.

- Hand washing was observed in practise in the Kinders, Preschool and Montessori room before meals times and after children used the toilet. Handwashing was observed after nappy changing in the Toddler room.
- Nappy changing procedures were observed and were carried out in line with the services policy and infection control measures, such as the use of gloves and aprons for each nappy change and washing of adult and children's hands following nappy changing.
- Sanitary areas were ventilated through means of openable windows and an air exchange system.
- Tables were cleaned before and after meal times. Children used individual placemats for their meal times in the Kinder, Preschool and Montessori rooms.
- Cleaning schedules were available for review, completed up to date. The service was presented in a clean and hygienic manner throughout.
- Bins were stored securely and were inaccessible to the children.
- Individual labelled containers were provided for the storage of children's soothers.
- A mouthed toy procedure was in place where mouthed toys were removed from play, washed and returned to the play area.

Safe Sleep:

- Sleep check records were available for review for all sleeping children, which were recorded every 10 mins and detailed the child's skin colour, breathing pattern and sleeping position and the room temperature, with staff signatures.
- The sleep room temperatures were maintained in line with safe sleep guidelines for the age of children in each sleep room on the day of inspection.
- Sleeping children were observed to be supervised during the inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Fire drills were carried out on a monthly basis, which was demonstrated by records available for review.
- Fire exits were observed free from obstruction, during the inspection.

Outing:

- The deputy manager confirmed that the older preschool children take part in one outing a year, at Christmas time, and outlined the appropriate safety measures and detailed the risk assessment prior to taking children on an outing.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

The following infection control risks were observed in the Toddler room;

1. Handwashing was not observed to be carried out prior to the children’s dinner time. This is not in line with the services infection control policy which states “handwashing is carried out before eating”.
2. It was observed that a number of children’s soothers were sterilised together in one container and not sterilised individually.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. The staff member involved was spoken to about this immediately and all staff were directed to re-read the infection control policy. Staff members will be updated on inspection outcomes at staff meeting (03/09/2025) where all issues will be discussed. Posters were put up in the rooms in the area where the dinner is served – reminding staff to check that the children have washed their hands. Management will be doing spot checks weekly to check that the children’s hands are being washed before all meal times in all care rooms and this audit will be documented by the manager.
2. The staff involved were spoken to immediately and all staff were informed that soothers needed to be sterilised individually at our monthly staff meeting. Our policies were updated to reflect this. All staff were directed to re-read the infection control policy. Staff members will be updated on inspection outcomes at staff meeting (03/09/2025) where all issues will be discussed. Posters are displayed in each of the care rooms reminding staff to wash soothers in warm soapy water and to sterilise them individually. The Infection control policy will continue to be reviewed annually at least and distributed to all staff. Infection control training will continue to be provided to staff.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

Infection policy review with staff sign-off sheet. Policy updated regarding soothers.
Posters on display re handwashing and soother washing and sterilising.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has adequately addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23.

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) Following review of staff files and the staff roster, it was evident that the registered provider ensured that there was a member of staff trained in First Aid Response (FAR) on the premises at all times, this was evidenced by nine staff FAR certificates on file.
- (2) (a) & (b) Suitably equipped first aid boxes were available on the premises and were stored in accessible and conspicuous locations throughout the service and available at all times.

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 of the fire drills that take place was available. The most recent fire drill was recorded on 18 July 2025.
- (b) The annual maintenance certificate for the fire extinguishers was dated 29 January 2025, and the smoke alarms was dated 20 June 2025.
- (4) The fire evacuation procedures were displayed on walls throughout the service, which contained details in relation to the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire.

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 60 pre-school children attending the service on a Full Day Care basis. The policy showed that the service had insurance in place from 28 March 2025 to 27 March 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
(c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated

Compliance Information

(c) Ventilation in the nappy changing area was by means of an air exchange system, which was observed to be effective, and no lingering malodour was observed. A boost button on the air exchange system that staff use following nappy changes is located in the kitchen and was observed in use on the day of inspection.