

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LS018
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Name of Service:	The Ferns Preschool
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Address of Service:	The Ferns, Main Street, Portarlinton, Co. Laois
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Eircode:	R32 VW9H
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sheila L Dunne Jnr
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	09/04/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	38	PM	Not applicable
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate Primary Care Centre Church Avenue Tullamore Co Offaly
Inspection undertaken by:	A Spain
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

The Ferns Preschool is a sessional service which is registered to care for up to 42 children between the hours of 9.00am and 12.00pm daily for 38 weeks of the year. There is currently a maximum of 39 children in daily attendance. The service cares for children in the age range 2 to 6 years. The service is located in the centre of Portarlinton town in county Laois. Rooms in use include four playrooms and sanitary accommodation for children off a hallway in the service. Sanitary accommodation for staff is located at first floor level in the premises. An enclosed outdoor area is located at the back of the premises for the sole use of the preschool service.

Staffing

The service is staffed by seven adults. The registered provider also works directly in the service. A student is also in attendance in a supernumery capacity one day a week in the service.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance, health, welfare and development of child and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on examination of compliance under:

Regulation 9 - Management and recruitment.

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels.

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child.

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play.

Regulation 25 – First aid.

Regulation 26 – Fire safety measures.

Regulation 27 – Supervision.

Regulation 28 – Insurance.

The scope of the inspection included all rooms in the service and the outdoor play area.

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 registered provider, deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The service had both a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b)

Both the designated person in charge and the named person to deputise were present in the service on the day of inspection.

(c)
It was observed on the day of inspection that each staff member clearly understood their roles and the rooms they were assigned to in order to meet the children's needs. The registered provider was also available in both a management capacity and to assist staff if required.

(2)(a)(b)
Two references from past employers were held on file in respect of one staff member. A reference from a past employer and a reference from a source other than a past employer were held on file in respect of two staff members. Two references from reputable sources were held on file in respect of the remaining 5 staff. A reference from a current employer and a reference from a reputable source were held on file in respect of the student on placement in the service.

(c)
A Garda vetting disclosure was held on file in respect of all staff members. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years for all staff members.

(4)
Certification was available to confirm that all staff working in the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education varying from level 5 to level 6.

(7)(a)
Records were held in the service to confirm that staff had received and read the policies, procedures and statements as specified in Schedule 5. A copy of the service policies and procedures was also available in the service on the day of inspection as a reference for staff.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(d)
International police vetting was not available in respect of one staff member who had lived outside of the state for over six consecutive months as an adult. It was acknowledged that the police vetting was subsequently secured by the registered provider in respect of the staff member and submitted to the inspector on 30 April 2025

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider advised in the CAPA response that international police vetting was secured for one staff member. A copy of the police vetting was submitted to the inspectorate on 30 April 2025. As a preventive measure, the registered provider advised in the CAPA response that a new electronic application has been introduced in the service to alert the registered provider in relation to all updates required.

Supporting documentation submitted.

A copy of the international police vetting was submitted.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 9(2)(d) 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)
An adequate number of adults cared for the children on the day of inspection. One adult cared for 10 children aged 4 to 5 years in room 1 in the service. A student was also available in the room in a supernumerary capacity. Two adults cared for 12 children aged 4 to 5 years in room 2 in the service. One adult cared for 8 children aged 3 to 4 years in room 3 in the service. One adult cared for 10 children aged 3 to 4 years in room four in the service.
- (3)
The inspector reviewed the attendance records and the staff roster for the week beginning the 3 March 2025. Records confirmed that the maximum number of children in daily attendance was 38 children with six staff members rostered 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

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The atmosphere in the service was calm and relaxed as children cared for in the rooms and in the garden engaged in conversations in group play, with the staff and with the inspector. Staff were observed to assist the children as requested in their group rooms and outdoors. Children and staff from rooms three and four were observed having snack time sitting on blankets in the outdoor area after supervised hand washing. Children enjoyed sandwiches, rolls, yogurts, apple, strawberry and grape segments and moved to different areas in the outdoor play area at their own pace when finished eating. Staff were observed to praise the children and introduced topics of interest for the children to talk about, which included having picnics and birthday activities they enjoyed. Staff were also observed to be respectful towards the children and thanked them for sitting to eat and for placing their lunch boxes in their bags outdoors when finished eating.

Children cared for in rooms one and two had snack time in their rooms, seated at low level tables and chairs. Staff were observed to sit and engage in conversation with the children. Children were observed to enjoy lunch and engage in free play in the rooms while remaining children sat and finished lunch at their individual pace.

Children's art projects were on display in the rooms in the service and included Easter themes with colourful easter eggs, chickens and easter bunnies. Meet our family pictures in the rooms were noted as themes to promote a sense of wellbeing in the service and cultivate relationships with home settings. Personal folders were maintained for each child with samples of activities engaged in and artwork to take home as requested and at the end of the school year.

Activities the children engaged in during the course of the inspection were child led with the staff offering assistance as required and requested. Children from rooms three and four were observed while playing outdoors. Children were observed to be engrossed in driving diggers in the clay area, playing with digging shovels in the sand box, driving play tractors, pushing wheelbarrows, in the playhouse and on the slide under the supervision of the staff.

Children also had the use of outdoor room four which comprised of an open room with a perspex roof covering and a side wall to divide the room from the outdoor garden area. Activities children were observed to enjoy in this

area included driving miniature wheel along toys in a clay box, playing with pots and pans and the sink in the mud kitchen area and engaged in construction work with bricks on a large table.

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, and
 - (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.
- (4) Where outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access is provided on the premises of a sessional pre-school service other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, a temporary pre-school service or a pre-school service in a drop-in centre, the registered provider shall ensure that such outdoor space is suitable, safe and secure.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

The rooms in the service were equipped with a variety of play and work equipment which was sited on low level shelves and in storage boxes for easy access by children in attendance. Additional toys and play equipment was stored on high shelving in the rooms for rotation depending on the children’s interests, the season and topic. The service had a range of materials and toys that offered stimulation, exploration and imagination. Play equipment in the home corner in the outdoor playroom included shopping trolleys, prams, pushchairs and dolls. Small toys to wheel along the floor were provided in the area covered with an all-weather surface. A variety of arts and crafts materials was observed in room three which included paint, brushes, paper plates, pencils and colours. Toys for table top activities observed in room two included jigsaws, puzzles, beaded cubes, shape insets and connecting toys. The nature table in playroom one was stocked with leaves, cones and shells.

All children were provided with an opportunity to play outdoors for fresh air and physical activity on the day of inspection. A section of the outdoor area was roofed to allow play during both hot and poor weather conditions. A

variety of toys on wheels to both push along and drive, wooded boxes with clay for digging and construction work, tyres to climb through and play houses were noted outdoors.

(b)

A soft couch, tables and chairs were located in a section of the outdoor play room for children to take a break, sit and relax as required. Large soft cushions were provided in playrooms 1 and 2 for children to withdraw from activities and rest as necessary. Books were located on low open shelving and within easy access for children in the rest areas.

(4)

The outdoor play area was located at the back of and directly off the hallway outside playrooms two, three and four. The area was safely and securely fenced in by a high level stone wall on the rear side boundary and high level timber fence on the remaining site boundary to both deny unauthorised access to the service and guard against unsupervised exit by children when playing outdoors.

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)

A staff member working in the service had up to date FAR training with an expiry date of the 25 February 2027. Subsequent to the inspection, the registered provider submitted written confirmation to advise that a second staff member was completing FAR training in May 2025.

(2)(a)

A suitably equipped first aid box was located on a high-level shelf in playroom two.

(b)

The first aid box was easily accessible to the staff caring for the children in the preschool service.

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.
- (2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-
- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,
 - (b) an employee, and
 - (c) an authorised person.
- (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)

The record of fire drills conducted in the service confirmed that drills were conducted on a monthly basis. The last fire drill was recorded on the 24 March 2025.

(b)

The maintenance record for the firefighting equipment in the service confirmed that an annual service was conducted on the 4 November 2024.

(2)(a)(b)(c)

The records referred to in paragraph (1) were open to inspection by a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending the service, an employee and an authorised person.

(4)

A notice of the procedure to follow in the event of a fire was on display in the playrooms in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

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

Compliance Information

Children were cared for in two groups of 8 children, a group of 10 children and a group of 12 children, across the four rooms in the service. The room layouts and group divisions facilitated constant supervision by both sight and sound when the children were indoors and when the children were taken outdoors for play during the course of the inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had insurance cover for a maximum of 42 children in daily attendance in a sessional service. Insurance cover was valid from the 28 March 2025 to the 27 March 2026.