

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015LS030
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Name of Service:	Tiddlywinks
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Address of Service:	Cappanafeacle, Ballyadams, Athy, Co. Laois
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Eircode:	R14 DT99
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Name of Registered Provider:	Joan O'Connor-Quinn
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	29/01/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	12	PM	NA
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, Primary Care Centre, Church Avenue, Tullamore, Co. Offaly R35K1W4
Inspection undertaken by:	R Flynn
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

Tiddlywinks is a privately operated preschool service located in a purpose-built premises on the grounds of the registered providers domestic dwelling. The early years' service provides sessional care and education to children aged 2-6 years in the town of Athy, Co Laois. Tiddlywinks operates Monday to Friday from 09.30am to 12.30pm. The premises consists of six playrooms, an art room, a library, a kitchen, boot room and an office. An enclosed outdoor play area is located at the back of the service. Two preschool rooms were operational on the day of inspection. Set down and parking facilities are available on site and also on the public road.

Staffing

The registered provider employs two staff in the service. There were two adults present on the day of the inspection including the registered provider and one childcare staff. The registered provider works directly with the preschool children and facilitated the inspection on 29 January.

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

- Regulation 9 (1)(a)(b), (2)(a)(b)(c)(d),(4), – Management and Recruitment

- Regulation 11(1)(3) – Staffing Levels
- Regulation 19(1)(a), Health, Welfare and Development of Child
- Regulation 23 – Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of child,
- Regulation 25 (1), (2)(a)(b). – First Aid
- Regulation 26(1) (a) (b), (4). – Fire Safety Measures
- Regulation 28 – Insurance

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, staff member 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)

There was a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b)

The named person in charge remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

(2)

Three staff files including the registered providers were reviewed and the following was noted:

(b)

Four written validated references were available from a reputable source.

- (c)
Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the registered provider and for 2 staff members. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d)
Police vetting was not required as no adult had lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months.
- (4)
All employed childcare staff members working directly with the preschool children attending the service held a Level 8 award in Early Childhood Care and Education on the National Framework of Qualifications.

Non-Compliance Information

- (2) (a)
One written reference from a previous employer in regard to one staff member was not validated.
- (b)
One written reference from a reputable source in regard to one staff member, was not validated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The dates that staff references had been verified were recorded. References for new staff will be verified and recorded, as per the services recruitment policy.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of verified reference received.
Recruitment policy received.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 9 have 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.

(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 were working directly with the preschool children on the day of inspection.

(3)

The ratio of adults to children was maintained on the day of the inspection. There were twelve children being cared for by two adults.

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) Basic Needs

Children were observed eating a packed lunch provided by their parents. Lunches consisted of a variety of sandwiches, yoghurts and fruit. Staff sat with the children during snack times and engaged in conversation. Children had individual drink bottles and drinks were readily available in their lunch bags. The children sat together at low level tables while eating and engaging in conversations with each other.

Regular hand washing was observed as children washed their hands before meals, after toileting and as needed. Self-toileting was supported, and children were supervised as necessary. Nappy changing facilities were available for any children who were not toilet trained.

Supporting relationships

Children were spoken to using their first names and appropriate eye contact was made. The registered provider informed the inspector that information and updates regarding the children's day to day activities were provided to parents at drop off and collection times.

Physical and material environment

The children were observed engaged, active and involved throughout the session as they independently chose between activities in the preschool room. Areas which promoted role play were available such as a play kitchen with equipment, a dressing table and a small world playhouse with furniture. Books were available on a shelf in the preschool room. Children participated in activities such as building a train track and making shapes with modelling dough using shape cutters and rollers. Children could take a break from activities and rest in the 'library' connected to the preschool room which had small couches and books.

The service had an outdoor play area to the back of the preschool building; however, the children did not get the opportunity to play outside due to the heavy rain and strong wind.

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 entrance door to the preschool was securely locked and controlled by staff to prevent children exiting the pre-school unsupervised and to prevent unauthorised access.

The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and safe storage of cleaning agents. Cleaning products were stored out of reach of the children in the kitchen. The door to the kitchen was observed closed throughout the inspection when not in use by staff.

Gates and fencing secured the perimeter of the outdoor play area to prevent children accessing the front of the premises when playing outdoors.

Infection Control:

Liquid soap and warm water were available for hand washing. Regular hand washing was observed throughout the morning as children washed their hands before their snack, after toileting and as needed. Pedal bins were available in the preschool rooms and sanitary accommodation for the hygienic disposal of waste. Mechanical ventilation was in place in the sanitary accommodation as well as openable windows. The preschool rooms were well-ventilated with openable windows.

Administration of Medication:

No medication was administered on the day of inspection. Staff were familiar with the procedure of administration of medication if required by a child.

Fire Safety:

The designated fire exits were observed to be unobstructed throughout the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

It was observed that two children’s lunchboxes contained whole grapes, which were not cut in half. One child had popcorn in their lunch box. These food items present a potential choking hazard.

Infection Control:

Paper hand towels were stored in a basket on the windowsill at the back of the children’s toilets in the sanitary accommodation. Staff were observed taking paper towels from the basket and handing them to the children after hand washing. This posed a potential risk of cross contamination.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

A text message was sent out to all parents to remind them of the food safety guidelines i.e. no popcorn or uncut grapes allowed due to risk of choking. Parents will be regularly reminded of food safety guidelines and the services healthy eating policy, using text message reminders, as well as in-person reminders to parents during drop-off/collection times. The healthy eating policy will be sent out to parents every year (or more often, if necessary).

Infection Control:

A basket of paper towels has been placed on low tables in both bathrooms that the children use so that they are now easily accessible to all children, and staff no longer have to hand the children their paper towels, this is a

temporary measure until a more permanent one can be arranged. The service plans to install paper towel dispensers at child height in the sanitary accommodation.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Healthy eating policy reviewed.

Copy of text message sent to parents viewed.

Infection Control:

Photograph's of baskets of paper towels viewed.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

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

(2)(a)

A suitably equipped first aid box was located in the service.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the pre-school service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

There was no staff member qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available in the preschool during the hours of operation. This presented a risk in the event of a medical emergency and staff were not trained in how to respond appropriately.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

First aid training has been booked for 08 April 2026. All required training for staff will be monitored and re-training will be booked as soon as necessary.

Supporting documentation submitted

Staff training policy received.

Booking confirmation of FAR training course viewed.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive action taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 25 remains outstanding until certification is achieved.

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.
- (3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation
- (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 written record was available of the monthly fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill was recorded on 19 December 2025.

(b)

Records were kept of the maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke detection alarms, which were last serviced in October 2025.

(4)

A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for twenty-two children attending the service and the expiry date noted was 27 March 2026.