

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH005
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Name of Service:	Acorn Academy
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Address of Service:	Stackallen, Slane, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	C15 EE76
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Name of Registered Provider:	Lisa Johnson
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	15/01/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	180-189 Lakeshore Drive, Airside Business Park, Swords, Co Dublin K67 Y5C6
Inspection undertaken by:	S. Cully
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

Acorn Academy is a privately owned preschool service located in Co. Meath. The service provides sessional preschool to children aged 2 – 6 years from 9.00am – 12.00pm and participates in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECCE) scheme. The preschool is operated from a purpose-built single storey building consisting of one care room with an adjoining sensory room, an office and sanitary facilities for children and adults. There are two enclosed outdoor spaces on the premises, a paved area and a garden/grass covered area. There is parking available at drop off and collection times.

Staffing

The registered provider works directly with the children on a daily basis. Two additional staff members are employed to work in the service. One staff member is employed under the Access and Inclusion Model funding programme administered by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

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.

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 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

(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,
- (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 registered provider was the designated person in charge of the service and there was a named person available to deputise as required.

(b) The registered provider was on the premises when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

A total of 3 staff files were reviewed including the file for the registered provider. All 3 adults whose files were reviewed work directly with the early years children attending the service.

(2)(a) Two written and validated references were available for the 2 adults and the registered provider.

(c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the 2 staff members and the registered provider who work directly with the preschool children.

(d) Following a review of information available in the staff files, there was no requirement for international police vetting disclosures for any staff member or the registered provider.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that the 2 staff members and the registered provider who work directly with the children held appropriate childcare qualifications at Level 5 or higher on the National Framework of Qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

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 was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at 10.00am and remained so throughout the inspection. There were 19 children present aged 3 years to 4 years being cared for by 3 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) The following observations are examples on how each child's learning, development and well-being was observed being facilitated during the inspection:

Basic needs:

- Staff were attentive to children's personal care needs. Children used toilets independently with discreet supervision and support given to those who required it. Reminders were given to children to wash their hands following toileting and before snack time. When preparing for outdoor play, staff ensured that all children had appropriate clothing to keep warm on a cold morning.
- Snack time was observed to be a relaxed and social occasion. The children's independence skills were encouraged as children were responsible for taking their lunch boxes to the table and encouraged to open packaging and bottles themselves. Children and staff talked together while eating, and children were given ample time to finish their snacks and drinks which were provided by parents.
- Since the previous inspection, the service has developed a sensory room where children can go to regulate, have quiet time or rest. This was implemented following reflection on children's emerging needs and materials are provided based on needs, interests, or individual care plans.
- The staff members were sensitive and responsive to promoting children's positive behaviour and helping them to resolve minor conflicts as they arose.
- The children moved freely in the indoor environment, moving from activity to activity if they wished and choosing activities or materials for themselves. The children also had time to be outdoors, and staff engaged children in exercise routines and dancing as part their curriculum to support physical development and healthy eating.

Supporting relationships around children:

- It was observed that the children and staff were comfortable and familiar with each other. Staff demonstrated they knew children's preferences through conversations together and provision of care. The children called the adults by name and looked to them for support, comfort, or guidance.
- The staff were observed to have nurturing interactions with children and use appropriate tones of voice when speaking with them. Children were spoken about positively and were often given encouraging feedback and praise.

- The service supports children’s connection with their community by inviting community service workers to visit the service or inviting parents or family members to come talk to the children about their hobbies or professions.

Physical and material environment:

- The environment was arranged by areas of interest so support children’s learning and play such as a home corner, reading area, art and sensory area, mark-making area, small world play and table top activities. There was a range of interesting materials in each area, including real life equipment and packaging in the home corner.
- There was access to sensory materials both indoors and outdoors. In the care room, children played with sand and homemade moulding dough. The sensory room provided opportunity for children to experience light, sound and touch activities with the provision of colour changing bubble tubes, wall mounted activity centre and music.
- There were 2 outdoor spaces available. The enclosed paved area was used on the day of inspection for exercise and dancing. The staff explained how they also bring ride along toys or bikes to this area. The enclosed garden, not used on the day of inspection due to ice, had a grass covered surface and a large wooden activity frame along with a sand tray and seating area. Additional outdoor equipment was stored in the garden shed.

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:

- Entry to the premises where the preschool building is situated was secured by an electronic gate which is closed after morning drop off to prevent an unauthorised person from gaining access to the children and prevent children from exiting the premises unsupervised.
- External doors of the service were also secured appropriately to prevent children from exiting unsupervised and to restrict access by an unauthorised person.

- Cleaning agents were stored appropriately and out of reach of children.
- Staff were observed checking children's packed lunches to ensure that food brought to the service was nut free and that grapes were cut in half to prevent choking hazards.
- Staff carried out a risk assessment of the garden area and determined that the remaining frost increased the risk of slips and falls and so the group remained in the enclosed paved area.
- A sandbox in the outdoor area was covered with a lid to keep the sand free from animal waste or other harmful materials.

Infection Control:

- Thermostatically controlled warm water, liquid soap and paper hand towels were provided to support effective hand hygiene in the sanitary accommodations and the wash hand basin located in the care room.
- A pedal operated bin was in use in the care room to reduce risk of cross contamination when disposing of general waste.
- Good environmental cleaning practices were observed during the inspection, with tables being wiped down prior to snack times and after activities.
- Equipment, furniture, and materials in the service were clean and well maintained and a record of the cleaning schedule was on display.

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits were clearly identifiable and kept clear to allow for a quick exit from the premises if required.
- Children and staff were observed discussing the fire drill procedure following the fire safety activities carried out the previous week.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1) Records were available to show that children in attendance were checked in and out of the service by an employee on a daily basis.

(3)(a)(i)-(iv) The registered provider ensured that no other person, other than those mentioned above, could enter the premises without approval of an employee. The inspector was met at the locked gate of the premises and allowed entry following presentation of identification and warrant.

(3)(b) A written record was kept of visitors who entered the service, and the inspector was requested to record entry and exit from the service.

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 employed in the service was trained in paediatric first aid with a certificate awarded September 2023.

(2)(a)(b) The first aid box available in the service was suitably equipped and stored in an accessible location in the hallway.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) No staff member on the premises held current First Aid Response (FAR) certification. Previous certification for 2 staff members expired in September 2023. It is required that 1 adult trained in FAR is available on the premises at all times.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(1) Two staff members will complete First Aid Response training on February 24th. The final FAR certificates will be sent to the Early Years Inspector on receipt of them.

Preventative actions:

The registered provider stated that they are on a notification list with a training provider and will receive reminders in advance of when training is due to be renewed.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence of payment and enrolment in FAR training for 2 staff members due to be completed February 24th 2024.

Summary Comment

The registered provider provided evidence that training had been organised for 2 staff members and has given assurances that the training was completed on 24th February 2024. The Inspectorate accepts the registered providers assurances that FAR training has been completed by 2 staff members. Certification of FAR is to be submitted by the registered provider when it has been received.

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-
- (c) an authorised person.

Compliance Information

- (1)(a) Records were available to show that previous fire drills that took place on the premises were recorded. The most recent fire drill was carried out on 11th January 2024.
- (b) There was a record available that detailed the number, type and maintenance of firefighting equipment. The firefighting equipment was last serviced 28/08/2023. There was also a record available detailing the type of smoke alarm system on the premises.
- (2) Records were open to inspection by an authorised person, the early years inspector.

Non-Compliance Information

- (1)(b) There was no documentary evidence available to state that the smoke alarm system had been serviced annually, as required, since 14/02/2018.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The registered provider stated that a technician has been booked to commission the fire alarm system and they are awaiting a site visit.

Preventative actions:

An annual service agreement has been set up with a contractor.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence of a contract between the registered provider and technician to carry out the required work on an annual basis.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the response and evidence submitted. The registered provider has assured the inspectorate that a copy of updated records for the fire alarm system will be submitted on completion. Until then, the non-compliance under Regulation 26 (1)(b) remains outstanding.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An insurance certificate was available to demonstrate the preschool service was adequately insured. The service is currently insured to accommodate 22 sessional preschool children, with an expiry date 27/03/2024.