

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH045
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Name of Service:	Dolphins Early Education & Childcare Centre
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Address of Service:	2 The Walk, Inse Bay, Laytown, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	A92 HY59
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Name of Registered Provider:	Jennifer Healy
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Dates of Inspection:	09/02/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	45	PM	36
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Meath Child & Parent Support Hub, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
Inspection undertaken by:	D. Murray & AM. Cunningham
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

Dolphins Early Education & Childcare Centre provides full day care, part-time and sessional care & education to children from 1 to 6 years. The service operates from 07:30hrs to 6pm Monday to Friday and eligible children participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme from 09:15am to 12:15pm. A school aged service is also provided.

The rooms are as follows:

Wobbler room 1 caters for children from 1 to 2 years.

Wobbler room 2 facilitates the care of children from 2 to 3 years. This room was closed on the day of the inspection.

Pre School room sessional and the Pre -School room full day care provided care and education to children from 2 years 8 months to 5 years. The Pre -School room full day care is used for school aged children in the afternoons.

Other facilities include a main kitchen, office ,2 cot rooms and sanitary facilities. An enclosed outdoor area is located to the rear of the service.

Staffing

The registered provider employed a manager, assistant manager, deputy person in charge, 11 childcare staff, 1 school aged staff member and a cook. An additional childcare staff member was on temporary leave. The registered provider does not work 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

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This inspection was announced 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 inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the manager, deputy person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

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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.

(6A) Paragraph (4) shall not apply to an employee of a registered provider where - (a) the registered provider receives funding for the employment of the employee pursuant to a scheme funded by the Minister and known as the Access and Inclusion Model, and (b) the employment of the employee is for the purpose of providing support, pursuant to the scheme referred to in subparagraph (a), for a child attending the service to enable the child to participate in the programme known as the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) funding Programme."

Compliance Information

(1) (a) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) A designated person in charge was on the premises when the inspectors arrived unannounced to carry out the inspection.

(2) (a)&(b) The following files were reviewed:

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Five new staff members and 2 students. The remainder of the staff files were reviewed at a previous inspection and compliance achieved.

Fourteen validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosure was available for the 7 adults. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Three staff members had renewed their garda vetting's.

(d) Police vetting was available for 2 staff members who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) Five childcare staff members had a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 and above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

(6) (a) One staff member was employed under the scheme known as the Access and Inclusion Model

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

(2) On the day of inspection, the following adult to child ratios were observed when the service was operating at capacity:

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- In the Wobbler room 1 there were 10 children ranging in age from 1 year 2 years being cared for by 2 adults and a student. All children were attending on a full day care basis. Additional help was provided to this room at transitions times throughout the day.
- The Wobbler room 2 was closed on the day of inspection.
- In the Toddler room there were 11 children aged 2 to 3 years being cared for by 2 adults. All children were attending on a full day care basis.
- In the Pre- School room (sessional) there were 9 children ranging in age 2 years 8 months to 5 years being cared for by 3 adults. All children were attending on a sessional basis from 09:15am to 12:15pm.
- In the Pre- School room (full day care) there were 15 children ranging in age from 2 years 8 months to 5 years being cared for by 3 adults and 1 student. All children were attending on a full day care basis.

(8) (a) The registered provider ensured that 2 adults were present in the service at all times. This was confirmed by the staff roster and staff sign in records.

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 were made on how each child's learning, development and well-being was facilitated within the daily life in the service:

Basic needs:

- Mealtimes in the service were observed to be a social and pleasant experience for the children. Staff sat at the table whilst the children ate engaging them in conversation and provided assistance to the children as required. Children had easy access to their drinking cups which were accessible in their care rooms.
- In the Wobbler 1 and Toddler rooms any child who became upset or who were settling in were nurtured and cuddled until they settled. Sleep was child led for the younger children with the older children going to sleep at the service designated sleep time after lunch at 11:30pm.

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- Children's nappies were changed regularly and in a timely manner with warm one-to-one interactions during direct care. Staff members were responsive to the children's cues should they need to use the toilet, with discreet supervision provided and assistance given if required.
- Children were observed being allowed to self-direct their own play. The children were afforded the opportunity to choose activities and to follow through on their choices and change activities if they so wish. The themes in the care rooms were "Valentines Day" with artwork and activities conducted which supported this theme.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The staff members use a software application to communicate with parents and also speak to parents at pick up time regarding activities pertaining to their children during the day.
- The staff encouraged the children to engage positively with each other by adopting simple social rules such as turn taking, sharing in play activities and resolving minor disputes. Challenging behaviour when presented was dealt with in a calm and caring manner and the children responded well to distraction and re-direction.
- The adult's demonstrated knowledge of the individual care needs of the children especially the children with additional needs. Documented individual care plans were available to support these children with the involvement of an outside agency.

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, 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.

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Compliance Information

(1)(b) There were 2 cot rooms off the Wobbler room 1 with a total of 5 cots available for the younger children requiring sleep. Older children requiring sleep were facilitated on sleep mats in the Wobbler room 1 and the Toddler room. Within the care rooms there were mats, soft furnishings and cushions for children to take a break from activities and rest, if needed.

(3)(a) The outdoor area was enclosed with walls and had a secure side gate. The surface area consisted of artificial grass, cement and soft tiles. A partially covered area provided shelter from adverse weather.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(b)

The sleep mats used in the Toddler room were not the minimum dept of 6 cm and therefore were not sufficiently comfortable to support sleep.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The sleep mats have been replaced with new mats which meet the requirements minimum dept. The registered provider will ensure that all staff members are aware of the requirements to support safe sleep.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of sleep mats.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliances. The response received has been reviewed and accepted.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

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Compliance Information

- The play resources in the care rooms were accessible, organised and stored on shelving which allowed the children to select and replace materials. The care room had areas of interest which included home areas, construction area, musical play equipment, animal baskets, book rack beside cosy area, plastic/wooden building blocks, puzzles, dolls area, art and crafts materials, tuff trays with coloured rice and play materials and equipment.
- Equipment in the outdoor space included small slide, plastic playhouses and boxes with plastic toys, tyres and balancing planks, planting areas, mud kitchen, tuff tray and activity units on the walls. A shed was available for the storage of additional toys.

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 snacks and meals to the children attending on a full day care basis, prepared on site by the chef. A 3-week menu with a varied and nutritional choice of food to include meat, fish, chicken and a vegetarian option was available and on display in the service.

A selection of breakfast cereals and toast with butter was available for the children to have for breakfast on arrival to the service. The morning snack was served at 10am and consisted of a selection of fresh fruit. Lunch was served between 11:30 to 12 am which consisted of rice cakes with jam, yogurts and fruit. Dinner was served between 2 and 3 pm which consisted of Cajun Pasta Bows. An evening snack was served between 3:30pm and 4:00pm which consisted of lemon cake. A choice of milk or water was available to drink with meals.

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 following safety measures were in place on the day of inspection as demonstrated by the following examples:

- The main door to the service was secured by a buzzer system and the outdoor space was enclosed by walls with a secure side gate. These security measures ensured that a child did not exit unsupervised and restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the service and the outdoor spaces.
- All cleaning agents were stored out of reach of the children.
- All furniture and display units had a stable base with no risk of toppling identified. All play equipment seen on the day of inspection was suitable for the age, stage and development of the children in each care room.

Infection Control:

The following infection control measures were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- The service was clean with cleaning schedules maintained on a daily basis.
- All bins for contaminated waste were foot pedal operated.
- Warm water, hand paper towel and liquid soap was available in the children's sanitary facilities. The hand-washing policy and nappy changing policy were implemented in practice with appropriate hand washing for staff and children at all times.

Safe Sleep:

Safe sleep practices were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- Temperature of the cot room was maintained between 16 to 20°C and between 18 to 22°C in the care rooms used for sleep.
- A sleep log was available to record the position, colour and breathing pattern on all sleeping children at 10 minutes intervals.
- Block out blinds were available which created an atmosphere conducive to sleep.
- Children sleeping on sleep mats were supervised at all times.

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Fire Safety:

The following Fire Safety practices were observed in the service as demonstrated by the following examples:

- All emergency exit doors were accessible in the event of an evacuation.
- Fire drills were recorded on a monthly basis.

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) The service provided evidence that a person had up to date First Aid Responders course and was available at all times to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2)(a) and (b) A suitably equipped first aid box was available and safely stored in the premises.

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 written record was available of the fire drills completed in the service. The last recorded fire drill took place on the 23rd January 2026.

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(b) A record was maintained of the mains powered smoke alarms and firefighting equipment on the premises. The mains powered smoke alarms were last serviced on the 29th April 2025. The firefighting equipment was last serviced in August 2025.

(4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was conspicuously displayed in the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured that the service was adequately insured for 75 children at any one time attending for full day care. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28th August 2025 to the 27th August 2026.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-
(d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required.

Non-Compliance Information

The wallpaper was torn over the nappy changing area off the Wobbler room. In the sanitary closet the wallpaper was also torn over the sink. Smooth surfaces must be available in areas that require regular cleaning.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

The area over the nappy changing mat and over the sink in the sanitary closet off the Wobbler room has been tiled. The registered provider will ensure that all sanitary areas are maintained and tiled where necessary with smooth surfaces that require regular cleaning.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence of tiles in place over the nappy changing mat and over the sink.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non-compliances. The response received has been reviewed and accepted.