

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH046
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Name of Service:	Early Buds Creche
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Address of Service:	2 Castle Hill, Slane, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	C15 X744
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Name of Registered Provider:	Alison Hickey, Frank Hickey
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date(s) of Inspection:	05/02/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	34	PM	26
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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:	AM Cunningham & D Murray
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

Early Buds Creche is a full day service established in 2006, located on the outskirts of Slane in a residential area. The service provides sessional, full day care and part time education and care to pre-school children aged 2 years to 6 years. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme and operates a sessional service from 9.30am to 12.30pm daily.

Staffing

Thirteen staff are employed in the service, which includes the manager (who is on statutory leave), deputy manager, and a cook. The registered providers do not work in the service on a daily basis but are available to staff when required. There were 10 adults present on the day of inspection and of which 9 were providing direct care to the children. Both registered providers arrived at the service following commencement of the inspection. Three students are also on placement in the service but were not present on the day of inspection.

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.

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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 providers, deputy manager, 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, 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.

(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."

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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) Eighteen files were reviewed which included the registered providers and the three students. Thirty one validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosure was available for all adults and students. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting was available for 3 staff members who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.
- (4) All 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) Three staff members were employed under the scheme known as the Access and Inclusion Model

Non-Compliance Information

- (2)(a)(b) References were not available as follows
- Two references were not available for one staff member
 - A second reference for one student was not available
 - Two references for another student were not available.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective Action

The registered provider stated that the required references were received.

Preventive Action

The registered provider will ensure the references are verified and received at appropriate timing.

Supporting documentation submitted

The registered provider submitted the outstanding references to the early year's inspectorate.

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Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 9.

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:

- In the Junior Preschool room there were 5 children ranging in age from 2 years to 3 years being cared for by 2 adults. Three children were attending on a full day care basis and 2 children were attending a sessional service.
- In the Preschool room there were 14 children aged 3 years to 4 years being cared for by 4 adults 2 of whom were providing AIM support. Thirteen children were attending on a full day care basis. And 1 child was attending on a full day care basis.
- In the Montessori room there were 15 children with an additional child arriving at 12:10pm ranging in age from 3 years to 4 years being cared for by 3 adults, one staff member was providing AIM support. Ten children were attending on full day care basis, 1 child was attending on a part time basis and 5 children were attending for sessional hours only.

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(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

Basic Needs of the Infants and Children.

- During mealtimes staff were observed sitting at tables engaged in social conversation with the children. Staff assisted children to feed themselves and encouraging others to use their cutlery independently where appropriate.
- The theme in the care rooms was "Under The Sea", with art work and activities conducted which supported this theme. In the Montessori room each child had a scrap book which was sent home when completed.
- Nappy changing with the younger children was carried out regularly and promptly and children in the older care rooms were observed accessing the sanitary area independently. Staff were available to provide assistance, if required.
- Staff were noted to be sensitive and responsive in promoting positive behaviour, getting down to the child's level and explaining about turn taking with equipment.

Supporting Relationships Around the Children:

- The staff demonstrated an appropriate level of knowledge of the children's preferences, interests, and individual capabilities. Individual care plans were available for children who required additional supervision and assistance.
- The service uses a software application to communicate with parents and also verbally at pick up time regarding activities pertaining to their children and planned events.
- The adults followed the children's lead in the care rooms, and the children were supported in individual and group play.

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- The rooms accommodated visual displays demonstrating photographic illustrations to support and include all children in the programme of care. The children were notified and consulted in advance of changes in the activities.

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,
- (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)(b) Cosy areas consisting of mats, cushions and soft furnishings were available in all care rooms should a child needed to take a break from activities and rest. Children who required sleep slept on sleep mats in the Junior Preschool room.

(3)(a) The outdoor area to the back of the service was enclosed by walls and fencing with a secure gate. The surface area consisted of artificial grass and paving bricks. An enclosed area and 2 partially sheltered area permitted outdoor play in all types of weather.

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.

Compliance Information

The care rooms had clearly defined areas of interest that children could engage in independently or with other children. Age-appropriate toys were available to the children in the care rooms well developed areas of interest home corners area, dress up, construction, messy play, and table tops activities. Low level shelving containing boxes of items such as puzzles, animals and construction toys were accessible to the children.

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Equipment in the outdoor area included wooden play houses, plastic play house and play equipment, 3 wooden benches, activity table, ride on toys, building blocks, push along toys and plastic boxes and shelving for storage of additional play equipment.

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 had a week menu plan with a variety of dishes ranging from vegetarian, meat and poultry freshly prepared in the service. All food is provided by the service except for the children attending on a sessional basis who brought in their own lunch. Morning snack commenced at 11am which was snacks from home such as sandwiches, fruit and yogurts. Dinner was served at 1pm which consisted of boiled ham, mash potatoes and carrots. Extra helpings were available if children requested some. Afternoon snack was served between 3.30pm and 4pm which consisted of cocktail sausages, onion rings and potato waffles. Water was available at mealtimes and in the care rooms.

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:

- A secure bell operated system was in place at the entrance door to monitor the safe entry and exit of the children to and from the childcare facility.
- The outdoor area was secured and gated to protect the children within. The children were supervised at all times during the inspection.
- The children's arrival and departure from the service was recorded in the record book.
- Medication and cleaning agents were stored in a secured area out of reach of the children

Infection Control:

- The sanitary facilities were equipped with warm water, liquid soap, hand paper towels and lidded, lined pedal operated bins.

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- The children washed their hands at appropriate intervals after activities, using the toilet and before mealtime.
- The nappy changing procedures were completed in accordance with the service's infection control procedure.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

In the Montessori room a swing bin which the children had to touch was used for the disposal of food and yogurt pots. Bins used for the disposal of food and contaminated waste must be non-touch foot pedal operated.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

The registered provider replaced the food bin in the Montessori room with a pedal bin.

The registered provider will ensure all rooms have pedal bins which are easily accessible to all children.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

The registered provider submitted a photograph of the new bin.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 23.

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.

Compliance Information

(1) Records demonstrated that the date and time of attendance and departure in respect of each pre-school child is recorded on a daily basis.

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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) An adult working in the service had a record of up to date First Aid Responder (FAR) training.
- (2)(a) A suitably equipped first aid box was available.
- (b) The first aid box was available for use by the adults in the event of an emergency

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) Records were available to demonstrate that monthly fire drills were carried out by the service The last fire drill took place on the 29/01/2026.
- (b) Up-to-date records of the number, type and maintenance service were available for the firefighting equipment and the smoke alarm system. The firefighting equipment was last serviced on 14/02/2025 and the smoke alarm system were last serviced on 13/01/2026.
- (4) A fire action notice was available demonstrating the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire.

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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 45 children at any one time. The policy showed that the service was insured from 28/03/2025 to the 27/03/2026.