

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH110
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Name of Service:	Little Buddies Playschool
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Address of Service:	18 Tudor Heights, Ashbourne, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	A84 KV08
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Name of Registered Provider:	Aisling Tracey
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Service type:	Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	11/12/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	20	PM	Not applicable.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	2 nd Floor, Unit 4/5 The Nexus Building, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Ballycoolin, Dublin 15
Inspection undertaken by:	Y Kelly
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

Little Buddies Playschool is privately owned and provides a sessional and part-time service from 09:00am to 13:00pm to children ranging in age from 2 to 6 years. Eligible children participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE). The service is located in a residential area on the ground floor of a house and consists of the following 2 care rooms: Playroom and the Montessori Room, sanitary facilities, kitchen, partially sheltered outdoor area and 2 grass outdoor areas at a higher level.

Staffing

The registered provider employs four early years practitioners who were all present on the day of the inspection. This included one member of staff employed to reduce the adult to child ratio and if necessary to work with a child with additional needs, in a post which is funded by the minister as part of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM).

Methodology

Tusla 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 9, 11, 15, 19, 23, 25 and 26. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the Playroom and the Montessori room. A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15.

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,
- (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) The service had a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as needed.

(b) The assistant manager was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced to the service at 9.15am and was present for the duration of the inspection. The registered provider arrived shortly afterwards and remained for the duration of the inspection.

(2) The files for 6 adults including the registered provider were reviewed, references for 5 adults were reviewed. The file for an external contractor who was not present on the day was also reviewed. The following was recorded:

- (a) Six written validated references were available from past employers.
- (b) Four written validated references were available from a reputable source other than a past employer.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for the 6 adults whose files were reviewed. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) International Police vetting was available for 1 adult who had lived outside of the state for a period of more than six months.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to confirm that 5 staff members whose files were reviewed and who may work directly with the children in the service held at least a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 or above on the National Framework of Qualifications or a qualification deemed eligible by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality.

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) On the day of the inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(2) The adult to child ratio was correct in the service when the inspector arrived unannounced and remained so throughout the inspection. There were 4 staff members working directly with 20 children aged 3 years to 4 years 10 months on the morning of the inspection, one of whom were employed as part of the Access and Inclusion Model.

(8) (a) The registered provider ensured that there are 2 adults on the premises at all times.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child

(1) A registered provider of a pre-school service other than a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a temporary pre-school service shall ensure that a record in writing is kept in respect of each pre-school child attending the service containing the following particulars:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child;*
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service;*
- (c) the date on which the child ceased to attend the service;*
- (d) the name and address of a parent or guardian of the child and a telephone number where that parent or guardian or a relative or friend of the child can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service;*
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child;*
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;*
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;*
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;*
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.*

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

(1) On review of a sample of 12 children's registration records, the required information and details were available. The following information was included:

- (a) the name and date of birth of the child.
- (b) the date on which the child first attended the service.
- (c) a provision for the date the child ceased to attend the service.
- (d) the name and address of an emergency contact of the child that can be contacted during the hours of operation of the service.
- (e) authorisation for the collection of the child.
- (f) details of any illness, disability, allergy or special need of the child, together with all the information relevant to the provision of special care or attention;
- (g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner;
- (h) record of immunisations, if any, received by the child;
- (i) written parental consent for appropriate medical treatment of the child in the event of an emergency.

(3)(c) Records were open to inspection by an authorised person. All records requested by the inspector were available for review.

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 were observed to be a social and pleasant experience for the children. Staff sat and ate with the children at snack time and engaged in conversations with the children. Children's snack and water bottles were brought from home. Snack consisted of cheese sandwiches, rolls, rice cakes, crackers, and fruit. Children's water bottles were accessible to the children.
- There was a cosy area in the service with mattress and blankets including a weighted blanket and there was a small cosy cubby area beside this for children's rest and relaxation. A selection of books supported storytelling opportunities and children's language development.
- Children's independence was supported. Children were free to choose materials independently and tidied these away when they had finished their activity. Children also used the bathroom independently with staff support as needed.

Supporting relationships:

- Staff demonstrated warm and caring interactions with the children. There was a welcoming atmosphere in the service. The early years practitioners demonstrated sensitivity and responsiveness to each child's individual needs and supported children's inclusion and involvement in play. Children were supported with solution-based problem solving during interactive play.
- Identity and belonging were promoted in the service. For example, there was a large 'Family Tree' displayed at children's level with framed photographs of children's families and 'Family Book' with family photographs accessible to children in the Playroom. In addition, each child had their own coat hook identified by photographs of the children. Children's artwork was displayed throughout the service.

- Staff discussed that they share observations of children with parents using an online digital application and parents' comments are shared with the service.
- Transitions were observed to be well managed; children were given verbal and visual cues to support them with the transitions. The children engaged well with tidying up, putting items away independently. Children who were moving from the outdoor to the indoor environment spent time taking off wellies and putting on shoes and washing hands in the outdoor sink before going indoors. Routines provided for predictability and comfort for young children.

Physical and material environment:

- The furniture provided in the care rooms was low level and appropriate to accommodate children whilst they played and ate in the care rooms. Toys and equipment were visible and accessible to children on low level shelving which facilitated children's independence in play. The Montessori room and the Playroom were divided into different areas of interest which provided opportunities for a variety of spontaneous play experiences and choice for children. In the Playroom interest areas included a home corner with wooden kitchen, real life crockery and dress up area with mirror and real-life dress up resources to include bags, bangles, hats, fascinator and masks to support imaginative and interactive play and a construction area with large hollow wooden block, plastic building bricks, animals and people. There was an art area with paint easel and art materials such as paint brushes and palettes, sponges, paper, pencils, scissors and glue to support creative art and mark making for children. Real life items included weighing scales and basket of stones to explore early numeracy concepts of heavy and light. In the Montessori room there was a cosy area with mat, cushions and blankets. There was a range of Montessori materials such as wooden cylinders and pink tower for early numeracy development and practical life resources such as dressing frames and pouring activities. There were tabletop materials such as threading, pegboards, jigsaws and games to support fine motor development.
- An enclosed outdoor area is located to the rear of the service. There was a covered area with large blackboard and chalk and whiteboard with markers, all of which supported mark making for children, sand tray, water wheels and funnels, real-life pots and pans to support sensory and dramatic play. Children's wellies and outdoor clothing were stored outside for outdoor play. There were child sized sofa's for children to sit and relax. There was a separate raised garden area surfaced with grass with large wooden slide and house structure, swings, mud kitchen and vegetable garden. This was not in use on the day of the inspection due to adverse weather conditions.

Programme of Activities:

- Conversations with staff ascertained that the service had a play-based child led curriculum using a curiosity approach and with elements of the Montessori curriculum.
- There is a key person approach in the service and key groups moved between the Montessori room, Playroom and the outdoor area.
- Children were observed engaging in outdoor play in the sheltered area where children were observed engaging in sensory play with sand.
- Children's learning and development is documented in children's learning journals which include learning stories with photographs of children's learning and development and children's paintings. Parents also share photographs from home. Children can bring home their learning journals as they choose. Staff carry out weekly planning which informs the curriculum.
- Staff discussed that process art is encouraged in the service and open-ended materials such as feathers, ribbons, fabric and beads were provided in the art area for children's creative use. Children's paintings of 'using blackberries as paint' were displayed.

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:

- On arrival to the service, the inspector observed that the door was secure and monitored by staff.
- Cleaning agents were stored safely out of the reach of children.
- The large outdoor play area to the rear of the service was fully enclosed and secured and was mainly surfaced with an impact absorbing surface in the covered outdoor area and grass in the large garden areas.

Infection Control:

- Children's lunch which was brought from home, were refrigerated to prevent spoiling of perishable items.
- Children were observed to hand wash independently after use of the toilet, after outdoor play and before lunchtime, and this was encouraged and supported by staff.

Administration of Medication:

- There were health care plans available for children who required them.
- No child required medication to be administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

- Emergency exits were unobstructed in the event of an emergency evacuation.

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 registered provider ensured that an adequate number of staff were trained in First Aid Response (FAR) and a staff member trained in FAR was available on the premises throughout the opening hours of the service. Two staff members were trained in First Aid Response (FAR), including the registered provider, both of whom were present on the day of the inspection. It is acknowledged that one staff member also held current paediatric first aid training who was present on the day of the inspection.

(2)(a) An adequately stocked first aid box was observed in the service.

(b) The first aid box was stored out of the reach of the children but available to staff as needed.

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) The registered provider ensured the following:
- (a) A record of monthly fire drills was available on the premises with the last drill dated as having been carried out on 14 November 2025.
 - (b) The number, type and maintenance record for the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms were available. Firefighting equipment and fire alarm and detection system were last serviced on 17 October 2025.
 - (4) Fire evacuation procedures were displayed in the service.