

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MH112
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Name of Service:	Little Folks Academy Limited
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Address of Service:	54 Teaguestown Wood, Dublin Road, Trim, Co. Meath
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Eircode:	C15 NP04
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Name of Registered Provider:	Lisa O'Brien
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	12/03/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	67	PM	45
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Tusla Early Years Inspectorate Family Resource Centre, Commons Road, Navan, Co. Meath
Inspection undertaken by:	AM Cunningham & S Taaffe
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

Little Folks Academy Limited is a childcare facility located within the local community in Trim, Co. Meath. The childcare service provides full day care, part time and a sessional service to preschool children aged from 1 year to 6 years and to school aged children. The service participates in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) scheme. The service operates from 08:00am-17:00pm Monday to Friday. The service is conducted from a purpose-built two-story building. There are six preschool care rooms, Wobbler Room 1, Wobbler Room 2, Toddler Room, Junior Preschool, Preschool Room 1 and Preschool Room 2. A school aged service with a designated school aged care room was also available. Additional facilities include a kitchen, sanitary facilities (nappy changing areas) and two sleep rooms. An outdoor play area is located to the back of the pre-school.

Staffing

The service employs nineteen adults which includes a manager, deputy manager, an assistant manager and two supervisors. The manager was the designated person in charge on the day of inspection. The registered provider does not work directly in the service but is available to staff when required.

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. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulations 9, 10, 16(k), 19, 23 (safety), 27 and 31(e); however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 22 and 23 (infection control). These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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

This inspection was carried out following receipt of a notification of incident from the registered provider of the service.

Acknowledgments

The inspectors wish to acknowledge the cooperation of the manager, assistant manager, 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
- (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."

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;

Compliance Information

(1)(a) The registered provider had identified a person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b) The manager was present on arrival of the inspectors and remained throughout the period of inspection.

Following a review of the staff files, and discussion with the manager, it was confirmed that there were 5 new members of staff employed since the last inspection on 09/08/2023.

All remaining staff files were reviewed at the previous inspection and met regulatory compliance following the inspection process.

The files for the 5 new staff members were reviewed on the day of inspection. One of these staff members cares for school aged children only.

(2)(a) & (b) Ten validated written references were available either from a past employer or from a reputable source.

(c) Garda vetting disclosure were available for the 5 adults. 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 1 staff member who had resided outside the jurisdiction for a period of more than 6 consecutive months as an adult.

(4) Four 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) Two staff members were employed under the scheme known as the Access and Inclusion Model

(7)(a) Staff members informed the inspectors that staff meetings took place outside of service hours at least once each term. The service manager informed the inspectors that occasional formal staff appraisals had previously been undertaken with some staff members although none had been conducted over recent months. Additionally, the service manager informed the inspectors that more informal staff support was provided to all staff members every 6 weeks or thereabouts in the form of 'job chats' where issues including the operation of the care rooms, continuing professional development plans and any challenges were discussed. Written records of these 'job chats' were maintained and provided for inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

(7)(a)

1. It was not evident in the documentation reviewed by the inspectors that the registered provider had ensured that all staff members were provided with relevant information and training when commencing employment in the service in relation to the service's policies and procedures. For example, the records indicated, and the service manager confirmed that one staff member who had commenced employment in the service five days in advance of the inspection had not been provided with or read appropriate information such as the service's policies and procedures prior to or since commencing working directly with the pre-school children in the service.
2. On the day of inspection there was no evidence available to show that relevant up-dated training had been provided to or was imminently planned for all staff members in relation to ensuring that all children were appropriately supervised at all times.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

7(a) (1)

Corrective Action

Going forward all service policies and procedures will be emailed to all new staff prior to their start in the service. We have put in place a checklist that will have to be signed off by the person responsible for the staff members Pre-Induction (the sending of all relevant documentation such as service policies and procedures) prior to commencement of any new staff members. This document is then to be counter signed by the service Manager to ensure its completion.

Preventive Action

Our Pre-Induction checklist will be used going forward to ensure that all staff members are sent the required documentation.

The Manager will sign off to ensure compliance with this requirement.

Any new staff members will be inducted using the service Induction checklist during their first days in the service.

7(a) (2)

Corrective Action

A staff training matrix has been developed and put in place.

Management are to fill this out prior to commencement of a staff member to establish what kind of training is required, the date training is due to expire, and any training that may be required in the near future.

Preventive Action

The training matrix is to be audited alongside the staff files per term to ensure compliance is met, and sustained going forward.

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Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has addressed the non compliances in Regulation 9. This will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 10 - Policies, procedures etc. of pre-school service

A registered provider of a pre-school service shall ensure that the written policies, procedures and statements specified in Schedule 5 are in place for the service.

Compliance Information

The following policies deemed relevant to this inspection were requested and reviewed and met the regulatory requirement:

1. Staff supervision policy
2. Outdoor play policy
3. Accidents and incidents policy.

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) There was an adequate number of adults working directly with the children on arrival of the inspectors. There were six care rooms in operation.

(2) The adult/child ratio was maintained throughout the care rooms as follows:

Ground floor of the building,

- **Wobbler 1 Room:** One adult cared for 5 children aged between 1 year 1 month and 1 year 8 months. One child availed of part-time care and 4 children availed of full day care.
- **Wobbler 2 Room:** Two adults cared for 6 children aged between 1 year 4 months and 2 years 1 month, all children were availing of full day care.
- **Toddler Room:** Two adults provided care to 10 children aged between 2 years 2 months to 2 years 11 months, all children were availing of full day care.
- **Junior Pre-School:** Three adults (one of whom provided AIM support) cared for 17 children aged between 3 years and 3 years 10 months, of which 12 children availed of full day care.

First floor of the building,

- **Pre-school Room 1:** Three adults (one adult provided AIM support) provided care to 19 children aged between 3 years to 4 years 10 months, of which 15 children availed of full day care and 4 children attended a sessional service which operated from 09.00am to 12 midday.
- **Pre-school Room 2:** Two adults provided care to 10 children aged between 3 years to 5 years; all children attended a sessional service which operated from 9.30am to 12.30pm.

This room was therefore used to accommodate school aged children in the afternoon of which 8 children were present with one adult.

Additionally, in the assigned **School-aged Room** in the afternoon two adults provided care to 12 school aged children.

(8) At all times there are at least two staff members on the premises, confirmed by staff sign in records and the staff roster.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of the following information in relation to the service:

(k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(k) A record of accidents and incidents were maintained in the service. Ten of these records were sampled and each were appropriately completed and included parental signatures to document that the relevant parents had been informed and were aware of any such events that had occurred.

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

(b) appropriate and suitable care practices are in place in the pre-school service, having regard to the number of children attending the service and the nature of their needs.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

Basic care needs:

- The adults spoke to children in a positive way and listened attentively to each child (with exception of the non-compliance below). In the Wobbler and Toddler rooms on the small number of occasions when a child became briefly upset, they were comforted and cuddled until they settled. The children showed confidence around the staff members and sought out staff members for reassurance, comfort and support.
- Staff members were observed engaging in warm one-to-one interactions when changing children's nappies. The older children were encouraged to become independent and self-caring, suitable to their age and stage of development which included using the toilet, hand washing, caring for their belongings and tidying away after activities and play.

- Some of the children in the Wobbler rooms availed of an early morning nap while the older children were placed to sleep for a scheduled period of rest at the service's designated sleep time after dinner.
- The service embraces outdoor play and learning with all children observed enjoying outdoor play with their peers on the day of inspection.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The service showed a positive regard towards the families of the children and family links were nurtured in the service with family photographs displayed on "The Family Tree" in the care rooms.
- Staff members in the two Wobbler Rooms, the Toddler Room and the Junior Preschool Room spoke positively and warmly to and about the children during the inspection, demonstrating an awareness of the children's individual likes, needs and preferences.
- Child-led play was facilitated in the two Wobbler Rooms, the Toddler Room and the Junior Preschool Room as evidenced in the children being supported and praised in their choice of equipment and play activities.
- Children in the Preschools rooms were observed carrying out art activities and enjoyed completing their art/hats for St Patricks Day. Children played pictorial bingo in Preschool room 2 which they appeared to enjoy as staff engaged in the game with them. Children in Preschool room 1 enjoyed free play, staff sat on the floor or beside children at the table to assist them with activities.
- In Preschool 2 children enjoyed story time in the cosy area and before dinner time in Preschool room 1 as they waited for their dinner. Children's language development was also supported in each of the 4 care rooms on the ground floor with singing, rhymes and storytelling heard during the inspection.
- Children in the Preschool rooms were accompanied to the toilet, if required, and children who were independent were supported and staff were overheard saying they were available if help is needed.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)(a) Books in the library area in Preschool Room 1 were in very poor repair. Many books had no covers and were tattered and torn making them difficult for children to peruse independently.

(b) A staff member in Pre-school Room 1 did not use a partnership approach or show warmth and positive regard for the children at all times during the inspection. Instead, on a number of occasions this staff member was heard using a loud and, at times, harsh tone of voice when engaging with the children using phrases including “don’t do that”, “sit down”, “stay there”, “stop that”, “be quiet” and “listen to the story”. This use of negative language towards the children was not supportive and frequently did not extend beyond giving instructions to the children rather than using encouragement and praise to support the children in their play and activities and to positively re-direct the children when necessary.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

19 (1) (a)

Corrective Action

Any ripped or torn books have been removed from circulation.

Preventive Action

Staff have been reminded to remove any ripped book from circulation immediately and to ensure that an audit of the children’s libraries are conducted weekly to ensure all books are of standard.

New books have been ordered for the service.

19 (1) (b)

Corrective Action

The staff member in question has been spoken to privately in relation to tone.

Staff member has been placed on Positive Behaviour Management training, and Child Protection training.

Preventive Action

Staff Support and Supervision will be undertaken for all employees over the coming weeks to ensure that any staff concerns are discussed with them privately and in person.

Supporting documentation submitted

The registered provider submitted evidence of new books ordered.

Enrolment for the staff member in Positive Behaviour Management training has been submitted to the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The registered provider has addressed the non compliances in Regulation 19 and the inspectorate accepts the assurances from the registered provider of actions taken. This will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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

A menu plan was available in the service. The children had access to potable water throughout the day. Children’s parents provided healthy nutritional lunches for the morning and afternoon.

Non-Compliance Information

At 12.35pm, dinnertime in Preschool room 1, fifteen full day care children were in attendance. The dinner provided was sourced from an outside catering company and reheated by staff in the service at dinnertime. The dinner available on the day of inspection was Caribbean chicken and rice. Three of the 15 children did not eat the Caribbean chicken and had dry rice only. No alternative was available for these children. Five children were observed asking for more dinner, there was only rice available once the children had their initial portion. The inspector reviewed the dinner packaging which stated that this dinner serves 7 portions. The quantity and portion size of the dinner provided was insufficient to meet the nutritional needs of the children in this care room.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Corrective Action

We have ensured that the food order has been increased.

Preventive Action

We will ensure that there is always an additional dinner available for children who refuse their meal. We will also monitor all dinners and if discovered that 1 dinner is not liked as much, we will ensure it is changed to a dinner that all of the children enjoy.

Supporting documentation submitted

The registered provider submitted correspondence with the catering company requesting additional dinners to be delivered to the service.

Summary Comment

The assurances from the registered provider have been accepted and will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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:

- All cleaning agents were stored out of reach of the children.
- The emergency exit doors were unobstructed.
- All furniture and display units had a stable base with no risk of toppling identified.

Infection Control:

The following infection control measures were observed:

- The hand washing policy and nappy changing policy were implemented in practice with appropriate hand washing for staff and children. On the ground floor of the service, warm running water was available in the children's sanitary area, along with a supply of liquid soap and hand paper towel for effective hand washing.
- The service was clean with cleaning schedules maintained on a daily basis.
- Pedal bins were available for general waste throughout the service.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The ambient lighting in the Toddler Room was excessively dark when 10 children were sleeping at 12.45pm during the inspection. The darkened room did not facilitate staff members to clearly see or easily monitor each child's colour, breathing pattern or position at the time of each sleep check. It is acknowledged that the service manager immediately adjusted the blackout blind to brighten the room sufficiently to facilitate appropriate monitoring of the children once the risk was highlighted by the inspector.

Infection Control:

2. The water in the wash basins on the first floor in the children's sanitary accommodation was cold which did not facilitate good hand washing technique. This was also a non-compliance on the previous inspection on the 09/08/2023.

Corrective and Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

Staff are ensuring he blinds are open to provide ambient light to ensure that the child's breathing, colour and position can be monitored.

Infection Control:

Boiler repaired to ensure warm water temperatures.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

Memo submitted to staff to ensure children can be always observed.

Infection Control:

Documentation received of gas boiler repaired by an outside company.

Summary Comment

The inspectorate accepts the response and assurances submitted by the registered provider which have addressed the non-compliances in Regulation 23. This will be reviewed at the next inspection.

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 in Preschool Room 1 and Preschool Room 2 demonstrated that the date and time of attendance and departure in respect of each preschool child is recorded on a daily basis.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) On the morning of the inspection 3 children from Wobbler Room 1 were accommodated in Wobbler Room 2. These 3 children were documented as present in the two separate roll books which were maintained in the two separate rooms. This posed a risk of the children not being counted accurately under the daily supervision routines or in the event of an evacuation emergency.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

24 (1)

Corrective Action

We have sent a memo to all staff with a new procedure for signing a child in and out.

Should a child be signed into wobbler 1 in the morning, and they then move to wobbler 2 that child will have to be signed out of the Wobbler 1 room, signed in to the Wobbler 2 room and signed out again when they are collected from the service.

Preventive Action

During the morning checks the Manager will check that all roll call books are reflective of the actual attendance of the children.

Summary Comment

The response from the registered provider has addressed the non-compliance in Regulation 24.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

On the day of inspection children were supervised at all times.

Non-Compliance Information

Although the inspectors observed staff members counting the children regularly during the inspection including before, during and after transitions to and from the outdoor play area, staff members did not always simultaneously review the documented attendance records to confirm that the number of children counted was a correct reflection of the number of children in attendance.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Corrective Action

Included in the memo sent to the staff was a reminder that all headcounts have to be double checked against attendance books.

Preventive Action

Management will model this example by ensuring that they perform headcounts themselves and double check these against the attendance levels on the roll call books during the morning checks.

All staff to be re-inducted on this procedure to ensure compliance is met and sustained.

Summary Comment

The response and assurances from the registered provider have been accepted to address the non-compliance's in Regulation 27, this will be reviewed at the next inspection.

Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 31 - Notification of incidents

A registered provider shall notify the Agency in writing within 3 working days of becoming aware of any of the following incidents occurring in the preschool service:

(e) an incident in respect of which a pre-school child attending the service goes missing while attending the service.

Compliance Information

(e) The manager of the service sent a notification of incident to the Early Years Inspectorate within 24 hours.