

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MO001
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Name of Service:	Abbey Tots
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Address of Service:	Mayo Abbey Community Childcare Services, Mayo Abbey, Claremorris, Co. Mayo
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Eircode:	F12 PD89
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Name of Registered Provider:	Denise Duggan
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Dates of Inspection:	11/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	27
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA, Child and Family Agency, 2nd Floor, St. Mary's HQ., Castlebar, Co. Mayo.
Inspection undertaken by:	M Farrell and A Kennedy
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	Click or tap here to enter text.
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Description of service

Abbey Tots is registered to provide full day, part time and sessional services to children aged from 0 to 6 years of age. The service opens from 8:00 to 18:00 hours with sessional services provided from 9:20 until 12:20 hours. The service is registered to provide school aged services. There are five care-rooms, a kitchen and a dining room, office, staff room and sanitary facilities in the premises that was purpose built for the provision of childcare services. The children have access to a number of enclosed outdoor play areas with play equipment and planting areas to the rear and side of the premises.

Staffing

There are sixteen staff working in the service including the manager, childcare workers, administrative staff, cooks and staff employed through community employment schemes

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. The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 22, 23, 24 and 27; however, on inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 29. 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

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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 person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(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.

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Compliance Information

Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that vetting for five staff members required review. Four of these staff members work directly with the children. A total of five files were reviewed. In addition, Garda vetting for 13 staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

The following information was made available for inspection for the five staff whose vetting files were reviewed:

- (2) (a) Two written, validated references from past employers particularly their most recent employers were available for three of the adults. One written, validated reference from a past employer for one staff member.
- (b) One written, validated reference from a source other than a past employer for one staff member.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all staff. However, the service did not adhere to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years. Please refer to the information outlined under regulation 23 of this report.
- (d) International police vetting was available for a time for one of the staff who worked directly with the children.
- (4) Evidence of the required qualification in Early Childhood Care and Education or equivalent was available for the two staff who worked directly with the preschool children.

Non-Compliance Information

The following vetting information was unavailable for inspection:

- (2) (a) Two written, validated references from past employers particularly their most recent employers were required for one of the adults.
- (d) The work history/curriculum vitae on file for one staff member had gaps in information and was incomplete. Additional information was required to confirm that international police vetting was not required for the staff member in relation to these gaps.
- (4) The documentation available for inspection regarding the qualification for a staff member who worked directly with the children was insufficient to show that the qualification met the regulatory requirements.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in writing that:

Corrective and Preventive Action

- (2)(a) The staff curriculum vitae has been reviewed, and references have been obtained from the two most recent

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previous employers. The service has introduced a mandatory recruitment validation form for all candidates and has planned a monthly audit of staff files.

- (d) All staff files were reviewed and any gaps in employment were identified and clarified directly with the staff member. Curriculum vitae were updated to reflect accurate employment and education/training timelines. The service has introduced a curriculum vitae screening checklist requiring all gaps to be explained before progressing a candidate. Recruitment staff have been trained and monthly audits scheduled in the service.
- (4) The staff member has received confirmation from the relevant body that the qualification does not meet the regulatory requirements. The staff member is in the process of undertaking the training required to complete the award and is not now considered in the adult:child ratio.
- An additional qualified staff member is now working with the children in the playroom while the staff member completes their award. The service will inform the Inspectorate when the qualification has been completed by the staff member.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copies of two written validated references, updated curriculum vitae, and evidence of application for verification of qualification to the relevant body.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the service have been assessed by the Inspectorate and deemed to have addressed the regulatory non-compliance on inspection. Evidence of the completion of the qualification by the staff member is to be submitted by the service on receipt.

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.*
- (4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-*
- (a) a sessional pre-school service, and*

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(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

(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 were adults working directly with children in the service when the inspectors arrived unannounced to the service. The designated person in charge also provided direct care to children at times during the inspection. A review of a sample of attendance records showed that an adequate number of adults worked directly with the children during service hours of operation.
- (2) The minimum adult to child ratios were provided on the morning of the unannounced inspection in accordance with the required ratios considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service as outlined below:

Baby room: 1 staff member cared for 2 children aged between 1 and 2 years of age.

Waddler room: 1 staff cared for 3 children aged between 1 years and 2 years of age and 2 children aged 2 years.

Toddler room: 2 staff cared for 6 children aged between 2 years and 3 years of age.

Preschool room: 2 staff cared for 8 children between 3 and 5 years of age in the morning. The playroom catered for school aged children only after the morning session was finished.

Playschool room: 2 staff cared for 8 children between 3 and 5 years of age in the morning. 3 staff cared for 14 children aged between 3 and 5 years in the afternoon after the children from the Preschool playroom attending full day care joined the group.
- (4) The minimum adult to child ratios were adhered to when sessional and full day care services at the same time in playrooms.
- (8)

The registered provider ensured that there were always at least 2 adults on the premises when children were present in the service as evidence in sample attendance records reviewed.

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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,

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

- Children had plenty of opportunities to move freely to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance.
- The service supported the children in forming and sustaining positive relationships with staff.
For example:
assigning a key person to each child;
showing respect for each unique child and developing their trust;
being actively involved in children's play, where appropriate (initiating games, joining when invited to by children);
behaving in a way that creates a positive atmosphere (having frequent social conversations, laughter and showing affection);
listening to the voice of the child as they communicate their needs, thoughts, and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children's cues, gestures, and body language;
encouraging children to think critically, ask questions and respond to them in a way that promotes sustained shared thinking; nurturing and comforting children;
using soft tones, the child's individual name, and getting down to their level and making eye contact.
- Visual aids (picture and word reminders) and instructions were displayed and used with the children to support their learning. Displayed on the walls were posters, visual aids, photographs, artwork, and themes including the children's art displays.
- The atmosphere in the learning environments were encouraging and unhurried.
- The children were supported to be confident about their identity and to have a strong sense of belonging, while in the service.
- The service provided parents and guardians with daily information, including significant events or activities involving their child, for example, verbal communication at drop of and collection times and the

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use of daily diaries in the baby and wobbler rooms. Examples of the children's 'individual learning journals' were reviewed and contained photographs of the children engaging in different activities, samples of their art and observations that staff had made of their progress in the service. The staff had also requested that parents complete templates to include their voice and views of their child's adjustment to the service and help with planning care provision.

- Staff adjusted the level of support provided to children depending on the child's abilities, allowing for children's partial participation and participation with support. Support plans were in place for children who needed additional supports with the staff showing familiarity with the plans during discussions with inspectors.
- The staff and children sang action songs and nursery rhymes in circle time.
- The younger children were observed practicing their balancing and walking skills with a walking aid and the wobblers were observed doing puzzles, playing with rice and listening to stories and doing action songs. The toddlers were observed playing with soft balls and a parachute and transforming their chill-out area into a pretend house.
- There was a varied selection of toys and play equipment displayed in the Preschool and Playschool room with additional toys for rotation in the storerooms. The equipment was displayed at levels accessible to the children facilitating their choice of play activity. The children in the Preschool room were read a story by a staff member about 'the tiger that came to tea' and a tea-set was set up at a table by the staff ready for the children to use as props during the story. Opportunities for messy play were provided using activity tables that were waist-high to the children. In the Preschool and Playschool rooms the activity tables contained coloured rice and chickpeas and toy black cauldrons or 'crops of gold' reflecting the St Patrick's day theme being celebrated by the children and staff. Playdough used by the children on the day was green further developing the St Patrick's day theme.
- The staff listened to children in a caring, gentle way when they expressed emotions, and reassured them that it is normal to experience positive and negative emotions at times. The staff acknowledged and accepted children's feelings and the relationships between children's actions and other's responses. The children were given choice on what to do next.
- The staff were observed helping children to find solutions, supporting them, and talking to the children in a variety of ways, discussing, questioning, modelling, and commentating, extending a child's activities and initiating games and activities. The staff provided significant opportunities for the child to decide their play activities and experiences.

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- Children's behaviour was managed in a competent and positive manner by the staff. It was observed that minor problems were handled promptly and positively by the staff. Staff used positive strategies to support children's inclusion. For example, the inspectors noted that the staff acknowledged a child's engagement in an activity 'that is great' 'well done' and used questions such as 'what should we do next?', 'is there any other way to do this?', to allow children to critically think and explore.
- The staff supported children to enter social groups, and to learn to help and positively engage with other children. They encouraged and praised children for specific, positive, and appropriate behaviours. Children were given positive alternatives, rather than just being told 'no'. Children were supported in preventing, managing, and resolving conflict. Children could identify, name, and explore their feelings both positive and negative.
- The younger children in the Baby room sat in highchairs with a five-point harness and the children in the Waddler room and Toddler rooms sat on age-appropriate chairs and tables to eat their meals
- The children were closely supervised by staff during meals and encouraged to feed themselves where possible. Bibs were put on the younger children where appropriate to protect their clothing from spillages. The children ate their meals sitting in groups together in the Preschool and Playschool playrooms. The staff were observed to sit with them and encourage conversations and socialising at mealtimes.
- The children who were toilet-trained in the Preschool and Playschool playrooms were supported and encouraged to use the toilet when they needed to with supports given to children who needed help.
- The individual sleep needs of the children in the Baby and Waddler rooms were catered for in partnership with parents. Children were placed in standard cots in the dedicated sleep rooms by the staff when they showed signs of tiredness during the day. Individual clean linen was provided, and the sleep room lighting was dimmed to create a restful atmosphere. Stackable beds were provided for older children in the toddler room to rest on accommodating their individual needs.
- There were rest areas with soft seating in the playrooms and children were observed to use them to rest and relax during the day.
- Children's nappies were observed to be changed when children's individual needs dictated by staff who were observed to chat and engage with the children during the nappy changes. Older children who were able to use the toilet independently were supported by the staff to do so but were within earshot of staff if they needed help. Boxes of tissues were available in the playrooms for children to clean their noses as needed. The children were encouraged and reminded to wash their hands, supervised and helped by staff

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as needed at appropriate times for example after using the toilet and nappy changes and after outdoor play.

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

- There was a healthy eating policy in place in the service. The person in charge advised that healthy eating was promoted within the service by visual aids, and adherence to best practice guidelines.
- Between 8am and 9am the children were provided with cereal, toast and a selection of fruits.
- At 10.30hrs, the children had their snack provided by the service which included pancakes and grapes.
- At 13.00hrs, the service provided children with the main meal of potato, carrots, parsnips, beans, bacon and white sauce and water to drink. Extra portions were offered if a child was hungry.
- At 15.00hrs, the service offered the children a selection of fruits, crackers and brown bread.
- Drinking water was available at a low-level countertop and accessible to children in the play spaces.
- Highchairs were available for the younger children, and age-appropriate tables and chairs were provided for the older children to consume their snacks/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 main door was secured on the inspectors' unannounced arrival to the service with a buzzer system in place to gain entry. The inspectors were admitted by staff following production of identification documents.
- The external doors to the premises were secured throughout the inspection. Safety gates were in place in the Baby and Waddler care-rooms to control access to the sanitary areas.

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- Blind cords on windows were appropriately secured with restricting devices.
- The toys and play equipment in use were suitable for the age and developmental stage of the children using it on the day.
- Daily records of attendance were kept for all the children attending the service.
- Cleaning products were stored out of reach of the children. The kitchen area was inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

- Warm water controlled below 43°C, paper towel and liquid soap was provided for hand washing and drying. The staff were observed to prompt to and supervise the children washing their hands at key times including before eating, after playing outdoors and using the toilet.
- Daily cleaning checklist were completed by staff and available for viewing in the playrooms.
- Windows were opened by staff at times to ventilate the playrooms.
- Boxes of tissues were available at low levels in the Toddler room and children were observed to be prompted by staff to use them to clean their noses when needed.
- Aprons and gloves were used appropriately by staff when changing children's nappies with changing mats cleaned down after use.
- Appropriate bins were used for the disposal of nappies.

Administration of Medication:

- The staff informed the inspectors that there was one child in attendance in the service on the day that required medication to be administered to them. The staff were familiar with the administration of medication policy.
- The staff were aware of the instructions and storage requirements of the medication.
- Medication was stored inaccessible to the pre-school children.

Safe Sleep:

- The service catered for children aged between 0-6 years of age with separate sleep rooms provided off the Baby and Toddler care-rooms.
- The children aged under two years were slept in standard cots with wipeable safety mattresses.
- On the day of inspection, children were observed sleeping on demand.
- After dinner on the day, children aged over 2 years rested/slept on stackable beds in the Toddler care-room and were supervised at all times by a staff member.

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- Staff kept written records of observations of the children's colour, position, breathing and if they were awake or asleep at ten-minute intervals. The air temperature of the sleep rooms was recorded by staff and maintained between the required 16-20°C.
- Individual bed linen was provided by the service and laundered regularly.

Fire Safety:

- The emergency exits were observed to be free from obstruction during the inspection.

Outing:

- It was advised by the staff that the service go for nature walks to the local football pitch.
- The staff were familiar with the outings procedure and advised that a risk assessment would be completed prior to the walk, consents would be given by the parents and guardians and the first aid box and the emergency contact numbers and spare clothes are brought on the walk.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Garda vetting was available for eighteen staff members. However, the vetting disclosure for one staff member was not dated within the previous three years in adherence to with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice 'EYI-RN12.3 Renewal of Garda Vetting'.
2. A gate in an outdoor area not used by the children during the inspection required additional measures to ensure security of the gate. An additional securing mechanism was placed on the gate by the designated person in charge during the inspection.
3. A cupboard lock was broken in the Waddler room which could pose a potential access/safety risk as there were paints in this press.
4. On the day of inspection at 11.38hrs, there was a temperature reading of 46.8°C, from the warm water tap at the wash hand basin, used by children in the nappy changing area. At 11.50hrs, there was a temperature reading of 47.3°C. These water temperatures were above the recommended 43°C upper safety limit to prevent potential risk of scalding.
5. The foot operated pedal bin in the Toddler room was broken, and a flip top bin was observed in hallway.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in writing that:

Corrective and Preventive Action

General Safety:

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1. All staff files were reviewed on 11 March 2026 to identify expired or soon-to-expire Garda Vetting. Renewal of Garda vetting has been added to the mandatory annual staff file audit. A Garda Vetting tracking log has been created to record vetting dates and renewal deadlines for all staff. A risk assessment form has been created.
2. A securing mechanism was placed on the gate on 11 March 2026 to ensure it remains closed at all times during operation. Staff were informed of the updated procedure and reminded to check the gate as part of daily safety checks and during the day. A monthly premises safety audit will check that all gates are functioning correctly with any issues reported immediately to management and logged.
3. The broken cupboard lock was replaced with a secure child-proof locking mechanism.. Staff were reminded immediately of the requirement to ensure all hazardous materials are always inaccessible to children and report any issue to management immediately. A monthly premises safety audit will now include inspection of all locks, gates, and storage areas containing hazardous materials.
4. The sink taken out of use on the day of inspection. The thermostatic controls were adjusted by the maintenance staff and will be inspected and serviced every 6 months or sooner if issues arise. Staff have been reminded of the requirement to test water before children use sinks. Any temperature outside the safe range must be reported immediately and recorded in the maintenance log.
5. The bins were replaced and staff were reminded that only foot-operated bins are permitted in children's areas for hygiene and infection control. Staff have been instructed to report any damaged or unsuitable equipment immediately using the maintenance log. A stock of spare foot-operated bins will be kept on site to allow immediate replacement if needed.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- Copies of Garda vetting renewal dated 21 March 2026, risk assessment template, checklist and photographs.

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted by the service to the Inspectorate has been reviewed and found to have addressed the non-compliance found under the regulation.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

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

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

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

(iii) an employee, or

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

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

Compliance Information

(1) All the children in attendance during the inspection were checked in and out of the service by an employee.

Written records were available in the service of the checking in and out of the children by the staff.

(3) (a) The designated person in charge approved the entries of the inspectors following review of their identification documents at the entrance door.

(b) Attendance details for the inspectors were recorded in a visitor book which contained records of previous visitors to the service.

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

The children were observed to be always supervised by the staff during the inspection. At mealtimes in the Preschool and Playschool rooms, the staff were observed to sit beside the children, chatting with them while supervising them closely. The children who were toilet-trained used the toilets by themselves when they needed to but were within earshot of staff members if they needed any help.

The children played outdoors in the courtyard outdoor area with the staff moving around allowing them to keep the children in their line of vision.

The staff were observed to perform regular checks on a sleeping child at least every ten minutes recording observations of their colour, breathing and position.

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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

(d)

1. The lid of the toilet cistern in the staff sanitary unit was missing and required replacement.
2. The tap at the wash hand basin in the Waddler room was broken and required replacement.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

The service advised in writing that:

Corrective and Preventive Action

(d)

1. A new cistern lid was fitted securely and the toilet was checked to ensure that it is safe.
2. The broken tap in the waddler room was replaced by a tradesman. The new tap was tested after installation to ensure it is functioning correctly, provides safe water flow, and poses no risk to children or staff.

To prevent recurrence of issues, a qualified plumber is to be contacted by staff immediately for any plumbing-related maintenance concerns. All staff have been informed that plumbing issues must be reported on the same day using the maintenance log. The Person in Charge will arrange a plumber promptly.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographic evidence

Summary Comment

The actions taken and evidence submitted to the Inspectorate by the service has been reviewed and found to have addressed the non-compliance found under Regulation 29 on inspection.