

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015MO105
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Name of Service:	Little Acorns Pre-school
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Address of Service:	Brackloon, Westport, Co. Mayo
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Eircode:	F28 XN47
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Name of Registered Provider:	Sarah Murphy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	15/10/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	33	PM	No.
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Quality and Regulation Directorate, Child and Family Agency. 2 nd Floor St Mary's HQ, Castlebar, Co Mayo. F23HP58
Inspection undertaken by:	B Lavin
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 Acorns is a sessional early years' service which provides a morning and afternoon session for 3 hours, Monday-Friday throughout the academic year. The preschool operates from a former primary school building which has been modified to use as an early years' service. There are 2 large playrooms and 2 outdoor play areas to the front and rear of the building.

Staffing

There are 8 staff employed to work in the service including the registered provider and a relief staff member who work directly with the children.

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 and welfare and development of child. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 Record of a preschool child.

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, 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

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises.*

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that each employee, unpaid worker and contractor is suitable and competent taking into consideration the nature of the needs of children, including by-

- (a) consideration of references from the person's past employers, if any, and in particular the most recent employer, if any,*
- (b) consideration of references from reputable sources in the case of a person who has no past employers,*
- (c) consideration of the vetting disclosure received from the National Vetting Bureau of the Garda Síochána in accordance with the Act of 2012 in respect of the person, and*
- (d) ensuring, insofar as is practicable, that where a person has lived in a state other than the State for a period of longer than 6 consecutive months, he or she provides police vetting from the police authorities in that state.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that, without prejudice to the generality of paragraph (2) and subject to paragraphs (5) and (6), each employee working directly with children attending the service holds at least a major

award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent.

Compliance Information

- 1)(a) The registered provider was the designated person in charge and there was a named person who was able to deputise as required.
- (b) During the period of inspection, the registered provider and the person in charge were on the premises and facilitated the inspection.
- (2) Following a review of the service files and discussion with the registered provider, it was confirmed that there were 8 members of staff employed in the service.
- (a) There were 13 written and appropriately validated references available from their most recent employer.
- (b) There were 2 written and appropriately validated references available from a source other than recent employer for 2 adults working in the service.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures were available for all the staff working in the service. The service adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew garda vetting every 3 years.
- (d) Police vetting disclosures were available for the 7 adults working in the service who had lived outside the jurisdiction for a period of over 6 months.
- (4) The 8 adults working directly with the children had attained major awards in Early childhood care and education at level 5 or above on the national framework of qualifications, or qualifications deemed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) to meet the regulatory requirement.

Non-Compliance Information

One written and validated reference was not available for 1 adult working in the service.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The written and validated reference is now on file. A recruitment compliance checklist has been established and will be signed off by the manager before a staff member takes up duties within the service.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentation evidence submitted to the Inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on 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 registered provider ensured that the following policies and procedures were in place as per schedule 5 for the service. The policies, procedures and statements were consistent with the service practices.

The registered provider ensured that the following policies and procedures were in place for the service:

- (a) Statement of purpose and function
- (b) Complaints policy
- (c) Administration of medication policy
- (d) Infection control policy
- (e) Managing behaviour policy
- (j) Accident and incident policy
- (k) Authorisation to collect children policy
- (i) Healthy eating 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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1) There were 7 adults working directly with children on the day of inspection.

The minimum adult to child ratios were provided on the morning of 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:

- Red Butterfly room: Three adults cared for 17 children attending on a sessional basis aged 4 -5 years of age.
- Yellow Caterpillar room: Three adults cared for 16 children attending on a sessional basis aged between 2 – 3 years of age.

The registered provider provided additional assistance within the playrooms where needed.

(3) The registered provider ensured that the minimum ratio of adults to children specified was maintained.

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.*

(4) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child to whom it relates ceases to attend the service.

Compliance Information

(1) (a) (d), (e), (f), (h), (i).

The inspector reviewed a random sample of 10 children's records. The records contained the required details as laid out under the regulation.

Seven of the records sampled had details of (g) recorded.

(3) (c)

The required information was made readily available for inspection in the service by the registered provider on request.

(4)

The registered provider confirmed that the records are retained for the required period of 2 years.

Non-Compliance Information

Ten of the records sampled did not have a record of:

(b) the date on which the child first attended the service

(c) provision for the date on which the child ceased to attend the service.

Three of the records sampled did not have a record of:

(g) the name and telephone number of the child's registered medical practitioner.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The records kept on file for the children attending the service have been updated to include the required information. The manager or deputy manager will oversee that all forms are completed correctly in the future.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentation evidence submitted to the Inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection.

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

- Drinking water was available to all children in individual beakers throughout the day.
- Children were observed eating their snack provided by the parents/guardians which consisted of fruit, yogurt, cheese, wraps and sandwiches. Children were supported during mealtimes with opening food items when needed. Independence was encouraged with self-help skills.
- Children sat at tables and chairs which were appropriate for their height and/or stage of development.
- The staff were observed sitting at the child's level and chatted in a respectful manner.
- The privacy and dignity of each child was respected during toileting.
- Well established rest facilities were available in the care rooms and children were observed spending time in this area for periods of rest throughout the day.
- Children had easy access to the outside areas throughout the day. Children moved freely between indoors and outdoors.
- The adults working with the children were sensitive and responsive in promoting positive behaviours and supported children to find positive solutions to sharing toys, equipment and turn taking.
- Children had plenty of opportunities to move themselves, to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance.
- Children had the opportunity to engage in sensory play within the care rooms. Children were observed to make play dough, paint, sand and enhance their fine motor skills with scooping and pouring in the tuff trays.

Supporting relationships

- The service supported the children in forming and sustaining positive relationships with staff.
- The staff were actively involved in children's play, where appropriate initiating games and joining in when invited to by children.

- The staff behaved in a way that created a positive atmosphere, having frequent social conversations, joint laughter, showing affection and group story time.
- The staff listened to the voice of the child as they communicated their needs, thoughts and experiences both verbally and non-verbally, by reading children’s cues, gestures and body language.
- Soft tones were used with the children, along with the child’s individual name, getting down to their level and making eye contact.
- The atmosphere in the learning environment was encouraging and unhurried.
- Staff guided and supported children who needed more help. Staff used positive strategies to support children’s inclusion, for example using personal greetings, news of the day, looking at family photographs, choice board, visual routines chart and giving appropriate encouragement.
- Staff communicated with parents and guardians by sharing knowledge and observations of the child’s interests, strengths, developmental and care needs, approaches to learning, changes in their life and any other concerns at drop off and collection times, by phone and by text and through the use of a bespoke childcare app.
- The staff were observed helping children to find solutions, supporting them and talking to the children in a variety of ways- discussing, modelling and initiating games and activities.
- Small group play opportunities were encouraged and facilitated within the care rooms and in the outdoor sheltered area. This provided staff with opportunities to get to know the children better, quieter play time and a sensory rich experience.

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 had evidence that 5 staff had current paediatric First Aid Responder training completed.

(2)(a) The registered provider had ensured that the service was equipped with first aid boxes.

(b) The first aid boxes were available to children when required.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service's insurance with an expiry date of 27/03/2026, was for a sessional service, for a maximum number of 44 children. The insurance covered the following,

- public liability,
- personal accident,
- insurance against fire and theft,
- buildings,
- outings undertaken as part of the service provision.