

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015OY021
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Name of Service:	Play Pals
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Address of Service:	Cloneygowan Hall, Cloneygowan, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
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Eircode:	R35 T020
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Name of Registered Provider:	Fran Hyland
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	29/04/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	26	PM	N/A
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, Primary Care Centre, Church Avenue, Tullamore Co. Offaly R35 K1W4
Inspection undertaken by:	R Flynn
Title:	Early Years Inspector

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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).

Description of service

Play Pals is a private sessional service providing care and education to preschool children aged between two and six years old. The service operates from a parish hall, four days per week, Monday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, from 09:15 – 12:45pm. The service is located in the rural town of Cloneygowan, in Tullamore, Co Offaly. The service consists of only large preschool room, which can be divided into two. A kitchen, storeroom and an office are located off the preschool room. An outdoor play area is to the rear of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider employs six staff to work in the service. There were five adults present on the day of the inspection including the registered provider and four childcare staff. The registered provider works directly with the preschool children and facilitated the inspection on 29 April.

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

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The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations

- Regulation 9 (1)(a)(b), (2)(a)(b)(c)(d),(4), – Management and Recruitment
- Regulation 11(1)(3) – Staffing Levels
- Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child
- Regulation 16 – Record in relation to pre-school service
- Regulation 17 – information for parents
- Regulation 19(1)(a), Health, Welfare and Development of Child
- Regulation 23 – Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of child
- Regulation 25 (1), (2)(a)(b). – First Aid
- Regulation 26(1) (a) (b), (4). – Fire Safety Measures

On inspection additional non-compliance which posed a risk was identified under Regulation 10. The finding is outlined within the relevant regulation 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

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*
- (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.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

There was a designated person in charge and a named person to deputise as required.

(b)

The named person in charge remained on the premises for the duration of the inspection.

(2)

The files for five staff members, the registered provider and one relief staff member were reviewed and the following was noted:

(a)

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Ten written validated references were available from a previous employer and

(b)

Four written validated reference were available from a reputable source.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the registered provider, five staff members and a relief staff member. The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

Police vetting was not required as no staff member had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months as an adult.

(4)

Five employed childcare staff members, the registered provider and the relief staff member working directly with the pre-school children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education Level 5 to Level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

The policy in place for Outings did not outline the following –

- The measures taken to ensure the safety and welfare of children when on an outing,
- risk assessment processes and procedures and how the service will respond to risks,
- procedures for supervising and checking children,
- details for the management of critical incident on outings i.e. missing child,
- first aid measures during outings.

The policy on Healthy Eating did not outline the following –

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- Parents and guardians/choices are supported
- How food is safely stored.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The Outings Policy for the service has been updated, and all staff members were provided with the new Policy to review.

The Healthy Eating Policy was amended to include Parent/Guardian choices are supported.

The policies will be checked regularly and updating accordingly.

Supporting documentation submitted

Updated Policy on Healthy Eating and Outings reviewed by the inspectorate.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 10 have been adequately addressed.

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)

An adequate number of adults were working directly with the preschool children on the day of inspection.

(3)

The ratio of adults to children was maintained on the day of the inspection.

There were 26 children aged between 2.8 years - 5 years being supervised directly by five adults.

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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.*

Compliance Information

(1)

In a review of twelve child enrolment records, information relating to (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i) was available in respect of children attending the service.

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:

- (a) the name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and of every other employee, unpaid worker and contractor;*
- (b) details of the class of service and the age profile of children for which the service is registered to provide services;*
- (c) details of the adult:child ratios in the service;*

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- (d) the type of care or programme provided in the service;*
- (e) the facilities available;*
- (f) the opening hours and fees;*
- (g) the policies, procedures and statements the service is required to maintain in accordance with Regulation 10;*
- (h) details of attendance by each pre-school child on a daily basis;*
- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis;*
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent;*
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.*

Compliance Information

(1)

The service kept and maintained written records of information in relation to the service in accordance with Regulation 16 (1) (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i).

(j)

The inspector was informed that medication is not routinely given to children attending the service. Blank administration of medication forms was available in the event that a child requires medication to be administered.

(k)

Ten accident and incident records were reviewed. Each accident and incident record had details of the accident/incident and were signed by the children's parents or guardians, and two staff members.

Part IV – Information and Records

Regulation 17 – Information for parents

A registered provider shall ensure that a parent or guardian of a child proposing to attend the service is provided with the information referred to in subparagraphs (a) to (g) of Regulation 16(1).

Compliance Information

A parent information folder was available for review in the service. The parental information reviewed included the required information in respect of Regulation 16(1)(a) to (g).

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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, and

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

Basic needs

Children were observed eating a packed lunch provided by their parents. Lunches consisted of a variety of sandwiches, yoghurts, crackers and fruit. The children sat together at low level tables while eating and engaging in conversations with each other. Staff engaged in conversation with the children during snack time. Children's drinks were accessible throughout the morning and readily available in their lunch bags.

Hand washing was observed as children washed their hands before meals, after toileting and as needed.

Self-toileting was supported, and children were supervised as necessary.

Supporting relationships

Staff members were observed to be warm, kind and respectful towards the children in their care. Children were spoken to using their first names, appropriate eye contact was made, and soft vocal tones were used during interactions. A birthday chart and a 'My Family Tree' displayed photographs of the children and their families. This helped the children feel connected to home. Photographs of the children participating in outings in the local area were displayed on the 'Community tree' wall, such as a Halloween walk, nature walks and at the nearby Grotto. The staff advised the inspector that information and updates regarding the service are provided to parents at drop off and collection times, and via an online messaging application.

Physical and material environment

The children were observed engaged, active and involved throughout the session as they chose between activities. Toys and play equipment were positioned at an accessible level on open shelving which nurtured independence, facilitated choice, and encouraged curiosity and spontaneous play. Areas which promoted role play were available such as a dress up area with a variety of costumes, and a play supermarket area with a cash register, trolleys and pretend play food.

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Children's language development was supported through one to one and group discussions, songs and storytelling which were observed during the inspection. A range of books were available in the reading area of the preschool room. Children had the opportunity to take the lead and exercise choice in relation to their engagement in activities and in accessing play equipment throughout the session.

Children were observed engaged in tabletop activities such as playing with modelling dough, with shape cutters and rolling pins. Children were observed on the floor playing with toy vehicles and toy animals. Staff were engaging with the children and talking with the children regarding what they were creating and building.

The service had an outdoor play area to the rear of the preschool building. An open roofed area allowed for play during all weather conditions. The natural grass area had a wooden climbing frame with swings and a slide; tyres placed in the grass for jumping and sitting on, and a mud kitchen. A group of children were observed to enjoy playing together with shovels, digging a hole in the garden. Ride on equipment, a sand tray, playhouses and a low level see saw were also available to the children.

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:

Entry to the service was secured and controlled with a bell entry system. This system prevented children from exiting the service unsupervised and restricted unauthorised persons from gaining access to the premises. Cleaning products were stored on high shelves in the sanitary accommodation and kitchen out of reach of children.

The toys and play equipment observed in use by the children on the day of inspection were well maintained and in good working order.

The outdoor oil tank was securely surrounded by fencing and inaccessible to the children.

Infection Control:

Warm water and liquid hand soap were available for hand washing. Paper hand towels were accessible to children from dispensers. The children were supported to wash their hands after outdoor play, before meals and after using the bathroom. Pedal bins were available in the preschool room for the hygienic disposal of waste.

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The preschool room and sanitary accommodation were well-ventilated with openable windows. Mechanical ventilation was in place in the sanitary accommodation.

Administration of Medication:

The registered provider informed the inspector that no child attending the service was on specific medication. No medication was administered on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

All fire exits were clear of obstruction. The fire assembly point was located at the front of the premises.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

Perishable food such as ham sandwiches and yoghurts contained in children's lunches brought in from home were not stored in the fridge.

Outing:

The registered provider advised that the children participate in outings. Documented risk assessments relating to outings previously undertaken by the service were not in place to support practice and ensure the safety of the children. The registered provider informed the inspector that outings occur to the local primary school and to an indoor activity centre annually with the children. It is acknowledged that parental consent had been recorded for outings for each child in their registration forms.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

A letter was issued to all Parents/Guardians to immediately start sending children's lunches in clear labelled lunch bags which will be placed into the refrigerator. If Parents forget to place lunches in labelled bags, a reminder will be provided to parents and also we will have clear bags and labels to allow staff to refrigerate the lunch. Cool boxes will be provided to store and carry lunches during outings.

Outing:

A new outings risk assessment checklist has been put in place for the service. risk assessments will be conducted prior to future outings.

Supporting documentation submitted

Infection Control:

Copy of letter sent to parents received.

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Outing:

Copy of the new Outings Risk assessment template received and reviewed.

Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliances identified under Regulation 23 have been adequately addressed.

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)

Two staff members were qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and were available on the premises during the operational hours of the service.

(2)(a)

A suitably equipped first aid box was located in the service.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the pre-school service.

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Part VI - Safety

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing is kept of-
- (a) any fire drill that takes place in the premises, and
 - (b) the number, type and maintenance record of fire fighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.
- (4) A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of fire shall be displayed in a conspicuous position in the premises.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)

A written record for the completed fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on 22 April 2026.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The smoke alarms in the premises were serviced on 21 November 2025.

(4)

A notice of the procedure to be followed in the event of a fire were positioned at doorways throughout the service.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) (b)

An annual maintenance record was not available in respect of the fire fighting equipment. The fire fighting equipment in the premises was last serviced on 31 January 2025.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

The fire fighting equipment was serviced, the day after the inspection on 30 April 2026. The service will check for fire cert to be up to date and not rely on the company to always be punctual with their inspections.

Supporting documentation submitted

Copy of certificate of fire fighting maintenance viewed by the inspectorate.

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Summary Comment

The inspector has reviewed the corrective and preventive actions taken and evidence submitted. The non-compliance identified under Regulation 26 has been adequately addressed.