

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015RN055
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Name of Service:	Wonder Years
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Address of Service:	Cornafulla South, Athlone, Co. Roscommon.
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Eircode:	N37 V594
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Name of Registered Provider:	Margaret Crehan,
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	20/06/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	61	PM	54
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	TUSLA - Child and Family Agency, Early Years Inspectorate, Quality Assurance Directorate, Clinical & Administration Building, Block A - (1st Floor- Green Corridor), Merlin Park, Galway.
Inspection undertaken by:	H. Heagney
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

This private pre-school service offers the options of full day care and part time care provision from 8.00hrs to 18.00hrs. An Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) pre-school and sessional care programmes are also offered from 9.30hrs to 12.30hrs, from Monday to Friday. The pre-school caters for children aged between 1 to 6 years of age. A child centred play-based pre-school curriculum focusing on emerging interests is provided. Additionally, a breakfast club from 8.00hrs to 9.00hrs and an afterschool programme from 14.00hrs to 18.00hrs is offered to school aged children with designated staff. This purpose-built pre-school service is located on its own grounds, to the rear of the registered providers home, in a rural location near the town of Athlone. There are six playrooms. On the ground floor, there was interconnected Caterpillar room (also named Baby room for children 1 to 2 years of age), the Busy Bees room (also named Toddlers for 2 to 3 year of age) and the Butterfly room (not in use of the day of inspection). On the first floor, there is an interconnected Beehive room (also named Preschool room for children aged 3 to 5 years), the Gingerbread room (also named Montessori Preschool room for children aged 3 to 5 years), and the Ladybirds room (not in use of the day of inspection). There is a designated sleep room, adjacent to the Caterpillar room, with six cots. Additionally, stackable beds are available for older pre-school children requiring sleep. The premise has its own kitchen, where children's main meals are prepared, cooked, and stored on site. The pre-school children have access to various secure outdoor play areas to the rear, side, and front of the premises, for children's play activities, fresh air, and exploration.

Staffing

There are a total of nineteen staff including the registered provider working in the premises. Documentary evidence indicates that sixteen staff hold a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) at a Level 5 to 8, in Early Childhood Care and Education or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. The staff have documentary evidence of on-going training and education. There are two designated chefs and a person with an administration only function.

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.

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)

At all times during the period of the inspection, the person in charge ensured that an adequate number of staff were working directly with the children.

(b)

The person in charge was on the premises when the early years inspector arrived and remained on site for the duration of the inspection. The service showed evidence that there was always a named person consistently in charge, on a day-to-day basis.

(2)

There were nineteen staff files.

(a)&(b)

Thirty-eight of the thirty-eight written validated references for the nineteen staff were from a past employer or from a source other than the past employer.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for all nineteen staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

Two of the nineteen staff had worked outside the jurisdiction, for six months or more, while over the age of 18 years of age, and had the required police vetting for that jurisdiction.

(4)

Sixteen staff who were working directly with children, held a Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI), at a Level 5 to 8, in Early Childhood Care and Education or a qualification deemed by the Minister to be equivalent. Copies of qualifications were on file for the sixteen staff.

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 a designated person in charge and there was a named person available to deputise in the service. The person in charge was on the premises when the early years inspector arrived and remained on site for the remainder of the inspection. Staff rosters indicated that either the designated person in charge or deputy were available on the premises at all times when the pre-school children were present.

(2)

On the morning of the inspection, there were 61 children present.

- 11 children were aged between 1 to 2 years,
- 12 children were aged between 2 to 3 years,
- 38 children were aged between 3 to 6 years.

There were thirteen staff directly caring for these children. In the morning, the registered provider and the person in charge acted as childcare relief and assisted with the administration aspect of the inspection.

In the afternoon, of the inspection, there were 54 children present.

- 10 children were aged between 1 to 2 years,
- 10 children were aged between 2 to 3 years,
- 34 children were aged between 3 to 6 years.

There were eleven staff directly caring for and supervising these children. The registered provider and person in charge acted as childcare relief and assisted with the administration aspect of the inspection.

(8)(a)

The registered provider ensured that there were 2 staff on the premises at all times while the pre-school was operating.

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.*

(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.

(5) A registered provider shall ensure that a record in writing referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 2 years from the date on which the child attends the service.

Compliance Information

(1)(a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)&(i)

Twelve children's records were sampled and reviewed by the early year's inspector.

The twelve records reviewed showed that the entries were factual, consistent, and accurate.

The twelve children's records contained the following:-

- The name and date of birth of the child.
- The date in which the child first commenced in the service.

- The date on which the child stopped attending the service (where relevant).
 - The name and address of the child’s parent or guardian, and a telephone number where that parent or guardian (or a relative or friend of the parent or child) can be contacted during the hours of operation.
 - Written authorisation / permissions for collecting the child.
 - Details were recorded of any illness, allergy, or additional need(s) the child had, together with all the information relevant to the provision of specific care or attention.
 - The name and telephone number of the child’s registered medical practitioner.
 - A record of any immunisations the child has had and or a disclaimer (where applicable).
 - Written parental or guardian consent was included to allow the child to have appropriate medical treatment if there was / is an emergency.
- (4) & (5) The registered provider advised and documentary evidence from file review indicated, that all relevant children’s records were kept for 2 years from the date a child stops attending the service.

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

- Each child was given enough time to eat and enjoy their snack(s) and meal(s) without being rushed. The atmosphere during mealtimes was relaxed, with pleasant social interaction among the children and staff.
- The staff responded to children’s individual personalities, sensitivities and needs in relation to nappy changing, toileting and toilet training.
- On the day of the inspection, twenty-two children from the Caterpillar, the Busy bees, and Gingerbread rooms required nappy changing and were changed in a sensitive manner while having their dignity and privacy maintained.
- The toilet trained children had unrestricted access to the toilet and did not have to wait to use the toilet. Children were allowed to take their time during toileting. Staff encouraged and supported children to become more independent in toileting practices.

- Children were encouraged and supported to manage their own personal care appropriate to their own level of independence, and to develop self-help and personal hygiene skills. Younger children's soothers were steam sterilised as per the service policy.
- Children had plenty of opportunities to move themselves, to practice and improve their emerging skills, such as co-ordination and balance. The service had safe and comfortable spaces for toddlers or children not walking to lie, roll, creep, crawl, pull themselves up, learn to walk and to be protected from children who were more mobile.
- 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 in when invited to by children);
 - behaving in a way that creates a positive atmosphere (having frequent social conversations, joint 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.
- The atmosphere in the learning environment was encouraging and unhurried. The children were supported to be confident about their identity and to have a strong sense of belonging, each day, 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, a social media interactive communication application and a bespoke childcare application.
- The service had a designated childcare application with interactive communication with parents and guardians. There was section with photographs and a description of the child engaged in activities. Staff observations, a child's milestones and individual learning stories were captured. The childcare application

showed details of sleep provisions, meals, nappy changing / toileting, special activities, and a child's likes, needs and preferences and general observations / comments.

- The service provided opportunities for children to be involved with activities for example preparing for their graduation. There was evidence of community visitors such as army personnel, nurse, farmer, dentist, doctor, and Garda. The staff advised these visitors described their role in the community to the children and their day-to-day life.
- Children with additional care needs were provided with suitable staff support, facilities, activities, play opportunities, visual, auditory, tactile cues suitable to the child's care needs, age and stage of development.
- Sleeping children were supervised at all times by a staff member remaining in the room where children were sleeping after the main meal or a staff member going into the sleep room at least every 10 minutes and observing each child, on the morning of the inspection. Physical checks of sleeping children (at least every 10 minutes) were recorded in accordance with the service's policy on safe sleep.
- 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.
- On the day of inspection, the children were observed at free play, at story time, at circle time, at construction building, mix and matching, at sensory play, at pretend kitchen/ shop/ house with play accessories, and sorting stacking materials. The children used links and connectors, painted, played games, puzzles, and insets. The children enjoyed playing with a selection of transport vehicles. They fed, and dressed baby dolls, played with small world furniture, little people, cuddly toys, and dolls and musical instruments. They enjoyed art and craft work including painting, playdough, and sensory play.
- In the outdoor areas, the children were observed playing tennis and football, on push cars, tractors, and swings, balancing on tyres and on the bridge. The children had fun with hula hoops, using wheelbarrows and lawn mowers. The children explored and examined the planting areas for bugs and insects. The staff built a house for a grasshopper and the children collected food and shelter. The children sang songs such as 'Mary had a little lamb' and enjoyed chalk play. The children built a large track roadway and took turns balancing on same. The children enjoyed digging, filling buckets and shapes and sand play. The children had fun at pretend play and playing house, kitchen, and office. On the day of inspection, all the children predominantly played outside the staff ensured children had sunscreen top ups, wore hats and used shaded areas.

- 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 (positive and negative) and the relationships between children's actions and other's responses. In all the playrooms, 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. The staff provided significant opportunities for the child to decide their play activities and experiences.
- Staff responded to the younger children in a timely and appropriate way when they were crying or when becoming upset.
- 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' 'how are you?' and used questions prompts such as 'what should we do next?', 'let's look at how you are feeling', 'we can all share', 'look at this', '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.

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

- The service had a healthy eating policy.
- Adequate quantities of food and suitable portion sizes are available for children. The food was suitable for the age and stage of development of the child, and there was enough food supplied to cover the number of hours the child is in the care of the service. The children in Full Day Care – that is, for more than 5 hours – had at least two meals and two snacks offered to them, one of which was a hot meal. If a child does not want the food offered for any reason, a healthy alternative was offered.
- At 9.30hrs, the children had cereal or porridge, toast, and milk.
- At 12.30hrs, the children had fish fingers, beans, mashed potatoes, carrots, peas, and gravy.
- At 14.30hrs, the children had a selection of fruit pieces, yogurts, pancakes, and sandwiches.
- At 16.30hrs the children were offered crackers, yogurts, rice cakes and the younger children were offered baby biscuits.
- Children’s drinks were available to allow the children the opportunity to ‘self-serve’.
- The crockery, cutlery and drinking utensils used were suitable for the children’s ages and stage of development.
- The service provided furniture and utensils that are age appropriate and developmentally suitable to encourage each child to be involved in and enjoy his or her snack / mealtimes.
- Perishable items from children’s lunch boxes were stored in a fridge in each playroom.
- Staff advised no child was on formula feeds.

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 specifying the address of the service, catering for a full day care service for 85 children at any one time, with an expiry date of 27th of March 2025, was available.

The insurance covered

- public liability,
- personal accident,
- against fire and theft,
- outings,
- building.