

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO013
Name of Service:	First Friends Playgroup
Address of Service:	Geevagh Community Childcare, Geevagh, Co. Sligo
Eircode:	F52 Y338
Name of Registered Provider:	Elaine McTiernan
Service type:	Full Day
Date of Inspection:	10/10/2024
No of pre-school children:	AM 24 PM 6
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, TUSLA Child & Family Agency, Markievicz House, Barrack St, Sligo, F91 XC84
Inspection undertaken by:	L Costello and K Folan
Title:	Early Years Inspectors

Authority to Inspect

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate carries out inspections of Early Years Services under Section 58(J) of the Child Care Act 1991 (as inserted by Section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable
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Description of service

First Friends is a community run full day care service located on the grounds of Geevagh Community Centre. The registered provider operates the service from Geevagh health centre each weekday and currently accommodates maximum of 33 preschool children aged 2 years and 8 months to 6 years. The service operates 08:30 to 15:00 Monday and Friday and 8:30 to 17:30 Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday. The service operates mainly outdoors with access to five care rooms in the main building.

Staffing

On the day of inspection seven adults were employed in the service. The registered provider is a member of the voluntary committee board and does not directly work with the preschool 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, welfare and development of child/ safety and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 15, 16, 19, 21, 23, 25 and 28. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

Inspection findings are documented in the inspection report which is first issued in draft format to the service with an opportunity to respond to any findings. Where statutory requirements are identified as not being met, the registered provider must demonstrate how they have rectified the non-compliance and will prevent any non-compliance from re occurring. The Corrective Action and Preventive Action plan (CAPA) will be used to inform decisions about compliance with regulatory requirements. Where the registered provider fails to meet the statutory requirements an escalation process may be commenced.

The inspectorate reserves the right to edit responses received for reasons including clarity, completeness and compliance with administrative and legal processes.

The contents of the report are compiled by the inspectorate body.

Additional Information

An immediate action notice was issued to the registered provider on the 11th of October in relation to a safety concern under Regulation 23. The registered provider issued a response on the 11th of October to address this concern.

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

(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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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) (b).

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

(2) (a) (b).

The records of all seven adults employed in the service were reviewed.

Eight written and verified past employer references, were available in respect of four adults employed in the service.

(c)

Garda vetting disclosures were available for eight staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years

(d)

International police vetting was available for two adults employed in the service that had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)

Six adults 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

(2) (a) (b)

- The references for two adults employed in the service did not demonstrate the required consideration by the registered provider.
- References were unavailable for one adult employed in the service.

(2) (c)

- The garda vetting available for two staff members was not completed by the registered provider.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

In a written response the registered provider stated:

(2)(a) (b).

New References obtained by the service for two adults

Other adults employed on a casual basis as emergency cover will not be utilised until fresh references submitted and verified.

(2) (c)

We are awaiting Garda vetting to be returned by GNVB/ECI on 2 adults – both of whom are Registered Providers in Sligo.

Non-compliance brought to attention of administrator who will not engage emergency cover unless references are up to date and verified.

Supporting documentation submitted

References submitted to the inspectorate on the 29th of November 2024.

Garda vetting not submitted at the time of writing this report.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the person acting on behalf of the registered provider did adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. Outstanding information will be reviewed on next inspection.

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 were an adequate number of adults working directly with children attending the preschool service. There were three adults working directly with 24 children in the morning of the unannounced inspection and three adults working directly with six preschool children and 10 school aged children in the afternoon.

(2) The minimum ratio of adults to children ratio were provided on the day of the inspection in accordance with the required ratio considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service.

(8) (a)

The registered provider always ensured that there were at least two adults on the premises when children were present as evidenced by a sample review of attendance records.

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.*

(2) A registered provider of a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or of 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 particulars specified in subparagraphs (a), (d), (e) and (f) of paragraph (1).

(3) A record in writing referred to in paragraph (1) or (2) shall be open to inspection on the premises by-

- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child but only in respect of the record relating to that child,*
- (b) an employee who is authorised in that behalf by the registered provider, and*
- (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.

(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)-(i)

Eleven records of the children attending the service were reviewed. The required information from (a) to (i) was fully completed for each child.

(3) (c)

The records in writing were available for inspection by the inspector.

(4)

The person in charge confirmed the records are retained for the required period as set out by regulation

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;

(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.

(3) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises, and the documents and records referred to in paragraph (2)(a) shall be open to inspection whether on the premises or elsewhere, by an authorised person.

(4) A record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises by a parent or guardian of a child but only in respect of information concerning that child.

(5) For the purposes of operating the pre-school service, a record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection on the premises by an employee who is authorised in that behalf by the registered provider.

Compliance Information

1 (a)-(k)

On the day of the inspection, it was found that the service kept a record of the required information (a) to (k) as outlined below.

- (a) The name, position, qualifications and experience of the person in charge and employees was available.
- (b) The class of service and age profile of the children for which the service is registered for was 2 years 8 months to 6 years.
- (c) Details of the adult to child ratios were available on the daily attendance records and on the parents information board.
- (d) The type of care programme provided was described as a play based service with an emergent curriculum
- (e) The facilities available were full day care and a sessional service which offers the Early childhood care and education programme (ECCE).
- (f) The opening hours and fees were outlined on the Parents information wall in the hallway of the service.
- (g) The policy book was reviewed, and the service was found to keep a record of the policies, procedures and statements required under Regulation 10.
- (h) Daily attendance records containing the time of the children's arrival to and departure from the service were observed in a sample of records reviewed.
- (i) The staff roster and sign in sheet detailed staff attendance with start, finish and break times.

(j) A record of medicine administration was kept by the service which showed medicine was administered with signed parental consent.

(3) The designated person in charge made the written records available to the inspectors on request in the service.

(3)

The records were available for inspection by the inspector.

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

(1) A registered provider shall, in providing a pre-school service, ensure that-

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

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

The service operates mainly outdoors, and this area provided the preschool children with opportunities for adventure, imaginative play and role play. A large open space equipped with swings, slides, tyres, wooden houses, construction areas and mud kitchens offered the children opportunities to explore and direct their own sense of play. The children were observed to play both individually and in groups exploring the natural environment. The service provided balance bikes and ride on toys for development of gross motor skills. Arts and crafts were completed in the outdoors as well as the indoor care rooms. The outdoor area was equipped with two wooden structures to provide shelter, these shelters were equipped with mud kitchens and resources as well as jigsaws and puzzles all accessible to the preschool children. The indoor area was equipped with dedicated interest areas including construction, home corner, dress up, arts and crafts, building blocks and puzzles. All areas are well laid out with play materials accessible to children on open low-level shelving. The upstairs area allowed for free movement between spaces, offering a variety of experiences in each area, where children can explore.

The service took measures to ensure the transition from home to preschool was made as smooth as possible for the preschool child with the aid of 'Teddy'. Teddy is the preschools teddy bear that visits the home of the preschool children, and the preschool child is responsible for 'teddys' adventures and bringing back the news to the children in the class. This is documented in photographs in the service and allows for children to explore their creativity and develop their confidence when they present the adventures to classmates. The service places strong emphasis on the family and a family wall displaying pictures of the children's family provides a connection to home. Communication with families is completed through a private messaging service where, parents are informed of the daily activities occurring in the service. Important information is communicated at drop offs and collections. The adults in the service were observed to be respectful and kind in their interactions with the preschool children. Communication between staff members was effective ensuring that all children were being supervised at all times with regular head counts being noted in the outdoor area.

(1) (b)

The service operated a four-week meal plan which provided breakfast dinner and snacks for the children availing of full day care. Morning snack for all children was brought in from home in line with the service healthy eating policy. Snacks brought in from home included sandwiches with a variety of fillings, fruit, yoghurts, cheese and crackers. All lunches were stored in a fridge beside the main entrance. The service had a rolling snack where children chose when to have their snack and this took place from 10:30 to 11:30. The main meal of the day was chicken curry with vegetables and cous cous and extra portions were available for the preschool children if required. A dessert of fruit and yoghurt was also provided to the children availing of the full day care service. Drinking water was freely available throughout the day with a water station in place in a downstairs care room. Milk was provided with the main meal.

As the service operates mainly outdoors the children regularly change their shoes and put on outdoor clothes. Independence is promoted with these tasks and visual prompts are displayed in changing areas to prompt the children of the task at hand. The adults in the service supervised the children in completing these tasks and assisted if required. Independence in toileting was also promoted where the children toileted independently and prompted from a distance. On the day of inspection all children were toilet trained, a nappy changing area was available if required.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

The service operates mainly outdoors, and this area is equipped with a wide variety of age and developmentally appropriate equipment including swings, slides, balance tyres, construction areas, mud kitchens and sensory tables. Equipment indoors supplements the outdoor resources with home corners, arts and crafts, puzzles and tabletop activities all stored on open shelving accessible to the preschool child. Rest areas with soft furnishings and library area provides an opportunity for the preschool child to rest or opt out of an activity. Resources are well maintained and provide a rich and varied environment to encourage diversity equality and inclusion.

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:

- On arrival at the service, the door was found to be locked to prevent access by an unauthorised person and children leaving unattended.
- Internal doors were secured to prevent children exiting unsupervised.
- Emergency doors were unobstructed.
- Windows restrictors were in place for all windows accessible to children.
- Blind cords were secured with clips.
- The floor coverings were in good condition.
- Flexes and cables were secured and out of reach of children.
- Rooms being used as storage were locked and inaccessible to children.
- Waste bins were in a fenced off area outdoors and inaccessible to children.
- Medicines were stored in a designated cabinet and out of children's reach.
- Cleaning agents were stored in a high cabinet which was locked and out of reach of children.

Infection Control:

- Cleaning schedules were in place throughout the service and were up to date.
- Children's hands were washed before eating and after using the bathroom.
- Warm water, liquid hand soap and paper towels were available for effective hand washing.

Administration of Medication:

- No medication was administered on the day of the inspection. On discussion, staff demonstrated knowledge of the services administration of medication policy and the requirement for signed parental consent.
- Medication administration records are kept by the service and were available on the day of inspection

Fire Safety:

- Records showed that fire drills were carried out monthly in the service with the most recent drill taking place on the morning of the inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. In the outdoor area, a gate leading to an overgrown, enclosed community space was unlocked posing the risk of a child accessing the area unsupervised.
2. A bait box for pest and rodent control was found in the outdoor area and was accessible to children, posing a risk to children's health.
3. Thorn bushes from neighbouring areas were found in two separate areas of the outdoor space where children were playing.
4. A rusty nail was protruding from a loose wooden picket in the fence.
5. Potential pinch and crush points were found relating to two pieces of play equipment in the outdoor area. Due to the uneven surface of the grass area, gaps were visible between the ground and the following equipment.
 - A blue slide propped against a trye and being used without a stable base.
 - A large wooden tray that was being used for sensory play was being used without the legs of the table attached, resulting in an uneven surface with pinch points.
6. On the inspector's arrival at the service, it was observed that a mini trampoline was being used outdoors for children who did not require the trampoline as a therapeutic intervention. Trampolines are prohibited

in early years services unless required as a therapeutic intervention. It is acknowledged that once this was brought to the attention of staff, the mini trampoline was immediately removed

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

In a written response the registered provider stated:

1. In the outdoor area, a gate leading to an overgrown, enclosed community space was unlocked posing the risk of a child accessing the area unsupervised. Staff reminded to check gates before children access garden areas daily
2. A bait box for pest and rodent control was found in the outdoor area and was accessible to children, posing a risk to children's health. Box relocated Staff reminded to note and report any concerns to manager to be passed to buildings management (HSE).
3. Thorn bushes from neighbouring areas were found in two separate areas of the outdoor space where children were playing. Bushes cut back To maintain observation of bush growth and cut back when required.
4. A rusty nail was protruding from a loose wooden picket in the fence. Nail removed Staff reminded to observe and report any maintenance issues
5. Potential pinch and crush points were found relating to two pieces of play equipment in the outdoor area. Due to the uneven surface of the grass area, gaps were visible between the ground and the following equipment. Play equipment - Slide removed Wooden tray stabilised Staff reminded to observe and correct defects - children reminded to exercise caution and care for one another.
6. Staff Made Aware Trampolines only for use therapeutically.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photograph evidence submitted on the 29th of November 2024.
2. Photograph evidence submitted on the 29th of November 2024.
3. Photograph evidence submitted on the 29th of November 2024.
4. Photograph evidence submitted on the 29th of November 2024.

5. Photograph evidence submitted on the 29th of November 2024.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the person acting on behalf of the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection and will be reviewed on next inspection.

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

(2) (a) (b)

The registered provider ensured that a first aid box stocked with suitable and adequate equipment was stored in a conspicuous location in the service and accessible to the preschool children if required.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)

On the day of inspection one adult was trained in first aid responder with their start time of 09.15am. Preschool children are on site from 08.30am.

An Immediate action notice under regulation 23 was issued in relation to this issue on the 11th of October. Information received on the 14th of October from the registered provider stated that 2 staff had completed a basic first aid course online and these staff were enrolled to completed First Aid Responder course in November 2024.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

In a written response from the registered provider:

The manager's FAR training had expired due to cancellation of a number of training sessions by a number of training providers. The manager successfully completed new FAR training program.

Supporting documentation submitted

Documentary evidence of completion of FAR course submitted on the 29th of November 2024.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the person acting on behalf of the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection and will be reviewed on next inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider demonstrated that adequate insurance was in place for 24 preschool children in a full day care service up until the 27th of March 2025.