

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO027
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Name of Service:	Life Start Childcare
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Address of Service:	Pearse Road, Sligo, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F91 K5TF
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Name of Registered Provider:	Catherine McGowan
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	31/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	70	PM	46
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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, N McEndoo, S Killeen.
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

This full day care service is located in an urban setting. A service is provided to children aged between 0 and 6 years of age. The service is open from Monday to Friday between 8am to 5pm. A school age service is also provided. The premises is located in a detached two-storey building with six playrooms, a kitchen and office space on the ground floor. The service has shared use of the first floor of the building, where their staff room is located, with offices for a community-based support programme. The service has exclusive use of a well-developed outdoor area.

Staffing

On the day of inspection 34 adults were employed in the service. 31 Adults work directly with the children this includes the person in charge and deputy person in charge. There were two receptionists employed and one cook in the service. The service also facilitates student placements, and two students were on placement on the day of inspection.

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, 20, 22, 23, 27 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.

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.*

(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 person in charge and a person able to deputise as required.

(c)

There is a clear management structure in the service with lead educators and childcare workers. All staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

(2)

There are 34 adults employed in the service. 27 adult files were reviewed on the previous inspection. The person in charge confirmed 7 adults had been employed since the last inspection and 2 students which are the focus of this review:

(a) (b)

Seventeen verified past employer references and one verified reference from another source in the absence of a past employer was available for the nine adults.

(c)

Garda vetting had been obtained for all 36 adults in the service. 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 the one adult who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

(4)

Seven 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.

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 an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children. On the day 17 adults worked directly with 70 children on the inspectors' unannounced arrival to the service.

(2)

The minimum adult to child ratios were provided on the morning of the unannounced inspection in accordance with the required ratios considering the ages of the children and the length of time each child spent in the service as outlined below:

- Bluebell Room: 3 adults cared for 15 children aged from 3 to 5 years of age.

- Primrose Room: 3 adults cared for 6 children aged from 2 to 3 years of age.
- Lilly Room: 3 adults cared for 17 children aged 3 to 5 years of age.
- Sunflowers Room: 4 Adults cared for 18 children aged 3 to 5 years of age.
- Daisy Room: 1 Adult cared for 6 children aged 2 to 3 years of age.
- Poppy Room: 2 adults cared for 8 children aged 1 to 2 years of age.

In the afternoon at 14:10 the following ratios were observed.

- Bluebell Room: Room closed
- Primrose Room: 2 adults cared for 4 children aged from 2 to 3 years of age.
- Lilly Room: 3 adults cared for 14 children aged 3 to 5 years of age.
- Sunflowers Room: 3 Adults cared for 15 children aged 3 to 5 years of age.
- Daisy Room: 1 Adult cared for 6 children aged 2 to 3 years of age.
- Poppy Room: 2 adults cared for 7 children aged 1 to 2 years of age.

(8)

The registered provider ensured that there were always at least two adults on the premises when children were present in the service as evidenced in 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.

(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-i)

A random sample of sixteen sample records of the children attending the service were reviewed. The required information including the authorisation to collect the child, details of illness or special needs of the child, emergency contact and record of immunisations if received were fully completed for each child.

(3) (c)

The records in writing were available for inspection by the early year's inspector.

(4)

The person in charge confirmed that the records are retained for the required period as set out in the regulations.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child 19 to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

Compliance Information

(1) (a)

The service has six care rooms in operation all equipped with appropriate and suitable resources to meet the needs of the age and stage of the preschool children in each of the rooms.

- The Poppy Room catered for the young preschool child aged one to two years of age. This room was decorated to stimulate the imagination of the preschool child. Resources were placed at a low height with lots of floor-based play including rice boxes, soft matting, mirror walls, musical walls and sensory play. Soft play areas ensured safety for the young preschool child as they explored the room.
- The Primrose room catered for children aged two to three years of age. This room was laid out to allow free movement from one activity to another. Open low-level shelving was resourced with musical instruments, magnets, puzzles, small world items and farm animals. A home corner with kitchen, dolls and dress up area allowed for role and imaginative play.
- The Bluebell room catered for children aged three to five years of age availing of a seasonal service. This room was equipped with a variety of resources well laid out in various interest areas including arts and crafts, home corners, construction areas to allow the preschool children to learn and explore. A big focus on the day of the inspection was babies, the inspector was informed that this had been identified as an emerging interest from the children and extra resources to facilitate this had been introduced to the room. This included cots and beds for the babies, baby baths with water, suds, flannels and towels, buggies and food items for the babies.
- The Lily Room catered for children aged three to five years of age. The room had clearly defined interest areas, to which children were free to access during the day. There was ample supply of materials for the age and stage of the development of the children within the room. Arts and Crafts, construction, trains, small world, home corner with low level sink for ease of use, and a cosy reading and resting area. Messy play of homemade kinetic sand was also available the children under supervision. Adult furniture was also present. There was an access point to the outdoor area, children had the choice to play indoors or outdoors.
- The Sunflowers Room catered for children ages three to five. The room was well laid out, with clearly defined areas. An arts corner, messy play with water, reading and resting, construction and small world. There were plentiful materials for children to engage with, all of which were suited to the children's age and stage of development.
- The Daisy room catered for children from two to three years of age. The room consisted of a cosy reading and resting area with a large rug under foot and soft lighting for nap time. A home corner, construction

workstation, where also present. There were sufficient resources within the room to cater for the children's needs on the day of inspection, including, items such as wooden puzzles, real telephones, dolls house and characters. Messy play was available to the children under supervision.

- The Outdoor area was available for use for all ages who attended the service. It was sectioned off in places to cater for the younger children. The children had access to a mud kitchen, sand pit, and a gravel pit. There were several fixtures throughout the yard catering for gross motor development. There were large tyres embedded in the ground, climbing tower with slide and large wooden play boat. The floor was soft underfoot, with a sheltered roof covering part of the space to allow for use in all weathers.

(1) (b)

All care rooms had suitable rest areas in the form of soft matting, size appropriate sofas or cushions. There was one designated sleep room located of the 'poppy room' with four standard cots. All cots provided had a suitable waterproof mattress and individual bed linen was provided.

Stackable floor beds were available for the older children, and these were placed within the care rooms after dinner to facilitate those children that required sleep. The lighting was dimmed, and children were supported to sleep. Other children who did not avail of sleep time, went outside to play.

Children aged between 15 months and 24 months that no longer slept in a standard cot, slept on a floor mat with a sleep plan in place and evidence of consultation with parents.

Non-Compliance Information

(1) (b)

Four children aged between 15 months and 24 months were placed on fold up foam mats in the poppy room and not the required floor bed for children under 24 months. Floor beds for children under 24 months must have a firm, flat and waterproof mattress with a minimum depth of 6cm that offers the same level of support and comfort that they would have when sleeping in a cot.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

In a written response from the registered provider:

Corrective and Preventive Action

Floor beds with rigid sides have been purchased in addition to extra bedding. Foam bedding has been removed from the Poppy Room. The safe sleep policy has been updated and displayed within sleep rooms. We also had a staff meeting to discuss the areas of non-compliance.

Supporting documentation submitted

Sleep policy submitted. Invoice submitted

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

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 in place and operated a two-week menu plan. Meals are generally all provided by the service however the children availing of the sessional service can bring in their own snacks in line with the healthy eating policy. The main meal of the day consisted of chicken goujons, mashed potato and beans. Snacks provided by the service included a variety of fruits, crackers and breadsticks. The afternoon meal on the day was pasta and garlic bread. Water was observed to be served alongside meals. Portion size observed was suitable to the age and stage of preschool child. The service catered for children with food intolerances and preferences. On interview the chef in the service was knowledgeable about the children's preferences and aware of any allergies or intolerances with meal plans in place to support. Alternative meals can be provided if required and extra portions were readily available on the day. All rooms had a stock of breadsticks, rice cakes and raisins if required.

Non-Compliance Information

1. Water was not observed to be readily available for all children in the Lily room during the morning snack.
2. Lunch boxes containing perishable foods were not stored in a fridge prior to consumption which could pose a safety risk to the child.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

In a written response the registered provider stated:

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. Staff meeting was undertaken to remind staff that water is to be readily available at children's level.
 2. Staff were also reminded that food should be non-perishable for children who are bringing in a lunch.
- Staff meeting to address the non-compliance issues. We updated our healthy eating and nutrition policy,

and we issued this to staff and parents of children using the service to ensure that parents are vigilant when packing lunch for children.

Supporting documentation submitted

- Healthy eating policy submitted.
- Memo to parents submitted.
- Staff meeting minutes submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 23 - Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

A registered provider shall ensure that all reasonable measures are taken to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of a pre-school child attending the service and that the environment of the service is safe.

Compliance Information

General Safety:

- The main entrance into the service was found to be secured upon the inspectors unannounced arrival to the service, which prevented persons entering unauthorised and children from leaving the building unsupervised.
- All cleaning products were stored on high level shelving out of the reach of children.
- Materials and resources were maintained in a good state of repair.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the preschool children.
- Leads and flexes were secure and inaccessible to the preschool children.
- Allergy and safety notices were displayed on the notice board in the care rooms, informing adults of needs within the care room.

Infection Control:

- Tables were observed to be cleaned prior to mealtimes and after messy play and snack times in all care rooms.
- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean, with cleaning schedules displayed and up to date in each care room.

- Warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were available for hygiene hand washing. Children were observed to wash their hands regularly including before snacks and meals.
- Child friendly hand wash posters with picture instructions were placed above the wash basins.
- Spill kits were available in the care rooms if required.
- A cover was available for the sand pit, to be pulled across when not in use to prevent pests or rodents entering.

Administration of Medication:

- Medication was observed to be administered during the day in one care room. Medication was given in line with the service policy. On interview staff were knowledgeable about the medication policy and steps to take when they have to administer medication.
- Support plans were displayed in the care rooms for the administration of specialised medication and a clear protocol to follow.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors remained clear from obstruction on the day.
- Evacuation routes and fire assembly points were displayed on the notice boards within the care rooms.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. Green mesh surrounding the outdoor railings had fallen away in places, posing a risk to children.
2. A blind is required in the Sunflower room to reduce the glare from the sun. The room was dazzling in parts as a result of the glare.

Infection Control:

3. In the primrose room, the sofa had rips in the material exposing foam, resulting in an inability to clean effectively posing an infection control risk.
4. The bathroom wall in the Lily room required cleaning.
5. There was a build-up of dust on the radiators in the Lily room and required regular cleaning.
6. The mechanical ventilation systems in the Lily room required routine cleaning. A significant build-up of heavy dust had accumulated, this could negate the system operating efficiently.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

In a written response from the registered provider:

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. Green mesh has been fixed. This has been added to the garden risk assessment.
2. Blind has been purchased.

Infection Control:

3. Sofa has been fixed. This has been added to the weekly jobs for maintenance.
4. Bathroom has been cleaned.
5. Radiators have been cleaned. This has been added to the weekly jobs for maintenance.
6. Mechanical ventilation has been cleaned. This has been added to the weekly jobs for maintenance.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

1. Photographic evidence submitted
2. Invoice submitted.

Infection Control:

3. Photograph evidence submitted
4. Photographic evidence submitted.
5. Photographic evidence submitted.
6. Photographic evidence submitted. Risk assessment and checklist submitted.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventive actions submitted by the registered provider adequately address the non-compliance found on inspection. This regulation is now compliant.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

A registered provider shall ensure that pre-school children attending the service are supervised at all times.

Compliance Information

Children attending the service were observed to be supervised adequately at all times throughout the day.

In the care rooms the staff members worked well together ensuring that they positioned themselves in the room to ensure all children were in view. There was sufficient staff in all rooms ensuring that all children could be in view at all times.

At mealtimes, staff members sat alongside the preschool children, promoting independence and offering support if required. At sleep time, children were supervised physically until settled in the ‘poppy sleep room’, once asleep a further ten-minute physical sleep check continued, and sound was monitored. Children in stackable beds or floor mats were physically supervised by staff members remaining in the room alongside the sleeping child. Independence was promoted in toileting and children were encouraged to use the toilet independently and prompted from a distance, staff members only supported if required.

Staff members positioned themselves strategically in the outdoor area to ensure there was no blind spots as children played freely in the area.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The registered provider ensured adequate insurance was in place for 88 children in a full day care service up until 07 March 2025.