

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:	Sligo Family Support Ltd , The Lifestart Building, 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:	19/05/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	76	PM	41
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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 and M Farrell
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).

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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 1- 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 29 adults were employed in the service. 26 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 registered provider does not work in the service.

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

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under regulations 9, 11, 19, 23, 25 and 26. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulations within this report.

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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 deputy 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,*

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(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)

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

(1)(b)

The deputy person was available throughout the inspection.

(1)(c)

There was evidence of a governance structure within the service with room leaders and child care workers identified. On discussion with the staff members they were aware of their roles and responsibilities.

(2) (a) (b).

Following a review of previous inspection information, information available on inspection and discussion with the person in charge it was determined that four new staff members had been employed since the previous inspection.

Three of these new staff members work directly with the children. A person present had also joined the service on a Community Employment (C.E.) scheme. A total of four files were reviewed. In addition, Garda vetting for five staff members whose disclosures were identified as due for renewal were requested for review.

Seven written and verified past employer references and one written and verified reference from an other source was available in respect of the four staff members.

(2)(c)

Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for the four newly recruited staff members.

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The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years as demonstrated by the five renewals reviewed.

(2) (d)

International police vetting was available for one adult who had resided outside the state for a period of six months or more as an adult.

(3)

The required vetting procedures had been carried out prior to any adult having access to a preschool child.

(4)

Three 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, Disability and Equality (DCDE) 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,

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Compliance Information

- (1)
- There were an adequate number of adults working directly with children attending the preschool service. There were 17 adults working directly with 76 children in the morning of the unannounced inspection and 11 adults working directly with 36 children in the afternoon. There was an additional staff member available to cover breaks throughout the day.
- (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 ensured that there were always at least two adults on the premises when children were present in the service as evidenced in a sample of attendance records reviewed.

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)(b)

Basic Needs:

- The person in charge described how the service provides balanced meals and snacks each day. This was further evidenced by a review of the menu plan, a discussion with the cook and staff members and observation of meals in the care rooms. Morning snack included freshly made banana muffins served with fresh fruit. Some of the children attending the Bluebell room brought food from home with the remaining

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children availing of a snack of rice cakes, grated cheese and fruit provided by the service. The main meal of the day was mashed potato, fish fingers and mixed vegetables. All meals were served with drinks of water

- Nappy changing was observed to be an opportunity for positive engagement and interaction with the child as songs were sung and laughter observed. Nappy changing was completed in line with the service policy. The older children who were toileting independently were prompted to do so and supervised from a distance.
- Sleep needs were met in a structured format and also in response to a child's needs. A dedicated sleep room with four standard cots and four floor beds were provided adjacent to the poppy room. Sleep plans and a risk assessment with parental consent was available for one child aged under 24 months. Floor mats were available for those children over two years of age who availed of rest period after dinner time. Children were observed to be supervised adequately during sleep with staff members remaining in the rooms and documenting their ten-minute sleep checks.
- Children's basic needs were attended to with noses wiped as required and hands and faces cleaned after meals preserving dignity of the preschool child.

Supporting Relationships:

- Staff members were observed to be respectful, gentle, and kind in their interactions towards the children in their care. During mealtimes the staff members sat at the table and engaged in social conversation with children promoting a relaxed atmosphere. The staff members sat at the children's level when feeding the younger children or when assisting the children to feed themselves.
- The younger child were held and cuddled as needed throughout the day. There was evidence of familiarity between the staff and children as conversations were had about activities after school and holiday plans.
- The service took measures to support the children's relationships including keeping parents and guardians fully informed of the daily activities. This was complete through a communication sheet that goes home daily where parents received information in relation to the children's eating, sleeping and nappy changing. The staff were observed to speak with parents at collection and share information about the children.
- Pictures of families displayed on the walls in the care rooms ensured children's connection to home was maintained.
- The service had made efforts to ensure that children's routines are not disturbed due to staff changes or unfamiliarity. Daily routes and information for relief staff displayed on the walls of care rooms, highlight

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the routine of the day, needs of the children and important information such as allergies, food preferences or medication required.

Programme of Activities:

- Ongoing observations and assessments were documented which helped create a well-rounded picture of each child and their learnings. Observations were individual to the child and recorded tasks completed in individual journals. Activities completed were displayed in class room books in the hallway, keeping families up to date with the curriculum.
- Children's language development was observed to be supported through one to one and group discussions, songs and storytelling. Children in the Primrose playroom were observed to choose a book that a staff member sat and read with them in the playroom's rest area.
- On the day of inspection, the children were facilitated to make their own choice in selecting play equipment and activities that they wished to engage with. Turn taking and sharing was promoted; this was evidenced in all rooms on the day. Art activities were observed to reflect the playroom themes. For example, a group of children in the Sunflower playroom children coloured a space related picture reflecting the space theme in the room.

Physical and Material Environment:

- All six care rooms were laid out to stimulate the imagination of the preschool child. Sensory experiences were available through arts and crafts and sensory tables including water and rice. The Bluebell playroom has direct access to a small enclosed outdoor play area where children were observed to play at water tables. Fine motor development was supported using jigsaws, pins and threading puzzles. Opportunities for imaginary and role play were provided in the home corner and dress up area as well as construction area and farm animal areas.
- The younger rooms were resourced with equipment suitable to the age and stage of development of the young children in these rooms, including home corners, construction areas, animals, and musical instruments. Mirror and sensory walls. All equipment was stored on open shelving at children's heights so that choice can be facilitated.
- Through review of service policies and discussion with staff it was evident the children spent a lot of time outside daily and that outdoor play is promoted. Children spent time outside during the inspection in line with the garden roster which was on display in all care rooms.

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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 service was secure on the inspectors unannounced arrival to the service.
- The perimeter of the service was secured by a high level fencing and locked gates.
- Cleaning products were stored on high shelving out of children's reach in the care rooms.
- The kitchen was inaccessible to the preschool children.
- Sharp items such as scissors were stored out of reach of the children in the playrooms.
- Blind cords on playroom windows were adequately secured with securing devices.

Infection Control:

- Warm water, liquid soap and paper towels were available for effective hand hygiene.
- Children were observed to wash their hands prior to meal times, after messy play or using the bathroom.
- The service was visibly clean, with staff members observed to clean tables prior and post meal times and sweep floors.
- Cough etiquette was encouraged to limit the spread of germs and tissues were provided for nose wiping through the care rooms.
- Children's soothers were stored in small, lidded containers in the Primrose playroom.
- Foot pedal operated bins were observed to be provided for the disposal of waste.

Administration of Medication:

- On discussion with staff, they were aware of the medication policy in place within the service.
- Support plans were in place for children with medical needs.

Safe Sleep:

- Standard cots were available for children under two years of age.
- Floor beds were provided for children over 15 months and under 24 months with parental consent and a risk assessment in place.
- A staff member remained in the room with sleeping children, performing ten-minute checks of the sleeping children.

Fire Safety:

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- Emergency evacuation routes remained free of obstruction on the day of inspection.
- Emergency evacuation points were clearly displayed.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 25 - First aid

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that a person trained in first aid for children is, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service.

(2) A registered provider shall ensure that a suitably equipped first aid box for children-

- (a) is safely stored in an easily accessible and conspicuous position on the premises, and*
- (b) is available to the children attending the pre-school service at all times.*

Compliance Information

(1)
The person in charge demonstrated by way of certification that five adults were trained in first aid for children and available to the preschool child as required.

(2)(a)(b)

A fully stocked first aid box with appropriate resources was stored in a central location accessible to the preschool children as required.

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.*

(2) The record referred to in paragraph (1) shall be open to inspection by-

- (a) a parent or guardian of a pre-school child attending or proposing to attend the pre-school service,*
- (b) an employee, and*
- (c) an authorised person.*

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(3) A registered provider shall ensure that a record referred to in paragraph (2) is retained for a period of 5 years after its creation

(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)

The person in charge demonstrated by way of documentation that the most recent fire evacuation drill took place on the 22 April 2026.

(1)(b)

A record of fire fighting equipment with a maintenance date of 20 May 2026 and smoke alarms on the 18 May 2026 was available for review.

(2) (c)

These records were made available to the inspector on the day.

(3)

The person in charge is aware of the statutory requirement to retain these records for a period of five years from its creation.

(4)

Fire emergency evacuation procedures are clearly displayed on the walls of all care rooms.