

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015SO030
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Name of Service:	Little Buddies
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Address of Service:	Community Child Care Centre, Chapel Gardens, Rivertown, Co. Sligo
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Eircode:	F52 YC42
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Name of Registered Provider:	Jennifer Heavey
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Service type:	Full Day, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	03/12/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	30	PM	20
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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:	S. Killeen
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

Little Buddies is a community childcare facility which has been in operation since 2008. It is located in Rivertown, a rural village in County Sligo. This is a registered full day and sessional service and caters for children from one to six years of age is offered. The service is registered to cater for 52 children. A school age service is also provided. The service is open from Monday to Friday between 08.00 and 18:00 hours. The purpose-built facility has two floors. Two playrooms are available on the ground floor with a sensory room on the top floor and a large activity room, where the service operates a preschool morning. There are adequate sanitary and nappy changing facilities available. There is outdoor space available and accessed from the downstairs playroom.

Staffing

The service has a total of 11 employees, of whom 10 were present on the day of inspection. On the day of the inspection 7 staff members provided direct care to the children, one staff member was assigned to kitchen and catering duties. On the day of inspection, both the manager and deputy manager were present but remained supernumerary. The register provider does not work directly 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/ premises and facilities. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

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

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 16 (i) (j) (k).

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 on the day of inspection as there was no person present with FAR training present in the service between 14:00 and 18:00 Please see body of report under Reg 25 with more detail. An adequate response was submitted by the registered provider.

Acknowledgments

The inspector wishes 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

A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,*
 - (b) (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) (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)
- The registered provider ensured that.
- (a) There was a designated person in charge and a named adult to deputise in their absence.
 - (b) The designated person in charge was available on the premises throughout the period of inspection.
 - (c) There was 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.
- (2)

On the day of inspection, ten adults were present, the person in charge deputy person in charge, seven adults who were employed to work directly with the children, one adult who works in the kitchen. A second staff member also works in the kitchen on alternative days.

The following vetting information was available for eleven adults:

- (a) Eighteen written validated references from past employers for eleven adults.
- (b) Four written validated references from reputable sources for three adults.
- (c) Garda vetting disclosures had been obtained for eleven staff. The service also demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.
- (d) Police vetting from the police authorities in another state was available for four adults who had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or more.

(4)
Nine of the adult files reviewed, evidenced they held a major award at level 5 or above in early childhood care and education on the national qualification framework, 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.*

Compliance Information

- (1)
On the day of inspection, there was an adequate number of adults working directly with the preschool children attending the service.
- Sunflower room there was 2 staff members working with 9 children ranging in ages from 12months- 3 years.
 - Bluebell room there was 2 staff working with 10 children ranging in ages from 2 years 10 months to 3 years 10 months.

- Blossom room there was two staff working with 11 children ranging in ages from 3-4 years.

(2)

The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained at all times throughout the inspection.

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:

- (i) details of staff rosters on a daily basis.
- (j) details of any medication administered to a pre-school child attending the service with signed parental consent.
- (k) details of any accident, injury or incident involving a pre-school child attending the service.

Compliance Information

(1) (i)

The service had a roster in place to include the start and finish times of the adults employed to work directly with the preschool children. Additional floating staff members were rostered to ensure all staff received their breaks throughout the day.

(j)

Medication administration records were available for the preschool children with the necessary information in place including parental consent.

(k)

A sample of 18 accidents and incidents were reviewed in the service. It was evidenced that staff who witnessed the accident had completed the required form. The forms had been reviewed and signed by management and parent had been informed of the accident incident and had signed the form.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 19 - Health, welfare and development of child

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

(a) each child's learning, development and well-being is facilitated within the daily life of the pre-school service through the provision of the appropriate activities, interaction, materials and equipment, having regard to the age and stage of development of the child, and

Compliance Information

Physical and material environment:

- The three main playrooms were observed to be large, bright, and purposefully structured to support the developmental needs of the children, featuring clearly defined interest areas that facilitate play and learning.
- The Sunflower room catering for children from 12 months to 3 years, an alphabet-themed rug and ball pit promoted gross motor development and early literacy, shelving provided accessible toys—including blocks and cars—to encourage independent choice and fine motor skills.
- In the Bluebell Room catering to children aged 2 years 10 months to 3 years 10 months, the environment was thoughtfully arranged with child-sized furniture. Each room had a 'Family Wall' display that promotes a sense of identity and belonging. The preschool room had the children's artwork on the walls, while defined interest areas. There was a designated dress-up corner with mirrors and a fully equipped home corner—supported imaginative role-play and social development. A dedicated sensory table was provided, equipped with playdough and various cooking utensils to facilitate imaginative play, allowing children to simulate baking and food preparation. Low level open shelving containing blocks, Lego, magnets, and small-world figures to enhance fine motor skills and cognitive problem-solving. A dedicated 'cosy corner' with soft toys and cushions ensured children had a quiet space for rest and emotional regulation.
- The blossom room was located upstairs with children aged 3-4 years, the large bright room has ample space for the children to move freely, and materials and equipment was appropriated for the stage and development of the older children.
- A separate sensory room is provided to assist children with emotional and sensory regulation. The environment is configured with soft floor matting and low-level lighting to create a low-stimulus area. Resources available within the room include a black-out tent, a balancing board, and bean bags. Soft music was playing at the time of inspection to maintain a quiet atmosphere.
- Staff informed the inspector that outdoor play, forms an integral part of the daily routine and children spend time each day engaged in physical play outdoors. The outdoor environment is equipped with a variety of

resources—including swings, tunnels, ride-Ons, a sandpit, and climbing frames—designed to promote gross motor coordination and physical development. The inclusion of a barked area with trees, natural vegetation, and a large, grassed space provides essential opportunities for sensory exploration and engagement with the natural world during the children’s daily outdoor access.

Basic needs of the infant and children

- Children access the toilet during the session in accordance with their individual needs. Child friendly hand-washing posters were placed in the toilets to promote correct hand washing.
- Tissues were provided for runny noses and parents provided spare clothes and bibs for the younger children.
- Staff responded appropriately to the children and in a timely manner in the sunflower room when the younger children showed signs of tiredness staff were responsive with comfort.
- The daily routine effectively facilitates free movement and child-initiated activities. Short periods of adult-led sessions are carefully interspersed with extensive free play, allowing children the flexibility to select their own activities and move freely between different interest areas within the room.
- Staff successfully support children in developing independence appropriate to their age and stage, which includes encouraging self-feeding, toileting, getting dressed, and tidying away after activities.
- Staff use positive guidance methods to manage behaviour. They encourage children to negotiate conflicts among themselves, offering gentle mediation and using reassuring language such as, "We don't like it when our friends take the toys that we are using" and "soft hands" to promote empathy and positive social interactions.

Supporting relationships around children:

- The same staff members were present each day in the service which ensured that the children were familiar with the adults caring for them.
- Staff were attentive and caring in their approach and interacted with the children at their level and kept up the flow of conversation with them throughout the session children were actively listened to and praised and encouraged meant was offered to each child as they engage in different activities.
- Good teamwork was observed and staff worked well together and linking in with each other and sharing of the workload between them.
- Children were offered a sense of belonging through the provision of individually named places for their belonging personal belongings and by displays of artwork and photos of each child with their families.
- Children were enabled to engage positively with each other and were encouraged to be helpful, to take turns and share play resources with other children.

- Children's language, development and communication skills were supported through the positive interactions an ongoing conversation observed during the session and throughout storytelling, music and nursery rhymes that formed part of their play routine. The changing themes in the curriculum provided opportunities for the children to increase their vocabulary and expand their language.
- Children were regularly praised and encouraged throughout the morning which helped them to be confident and willing to communicate their ideas and to ask questions.

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 was found to be secured on arrival preventing unauthorised access or exit from the premises.
- Materials were observed to be in a good state of repair.
- Highchairs within the baby room were fitted with a 5-point safety harness and were in good state of repair.
- The outdoor area was secured with tall wooden fencing and a bolted gate.
- Grapes were observed to be cut in half, reducing the risk of choking to the child.

Infection Control:

- The materials and resources throughout the service were visually clean.
- Cleaning schedules were available on-site and demonstrated evidence of regular completion.
- Tables and highchairs were observed to be cleaned prior to and after mealtimes in all care rooms. There was adequate handwashing facilities provided throughout the service with liquid soap and paper towels.
- The sanitary facilities were observed to be ventilated by openable windows. Sanitary facilities were observed to be kept maintained and clean.
- Child friendly handwashing posters were placed beside the sinks. Handwashing was supervised by the adults to ensure all hands were cleaned effectively.

Administration of Medication:

- When interviewed, staff were aware of their responsibilities for the safe administration of medication. No medication was administered on the day of inspection. When discussed with staff, they were aware of their responsibilities for the safe administration of medication.

Safe Sleep:

- The service had a designated sleep room equipped with four cots and four floor beds, all of which were observed to be appropriate for the age and developmental needs of the children.
- Sleep checks were conducted every 10 minutes with staff checking time of check, Childs position, breathing, skin colour.
- Staff monitored the temperature of the sleep room which were recorded within the required range of 18°C to 22°C for children over 12 months.

Fire Safety:

- Fire doors were observed to be unobstructed throughout the service.
- Fire evacuation procedures were clearly displayed in the care rooms.
- Fire extinguishers were on the premises and easily accessible.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. The door of the sluice room was observed to be opened which contained chemicals that were accessible to the preschool children.
2. The radiator cover in the blossom room was broken with sharp wooden edges that were accessible to the children posing a risk of injury.
3. In the sensory room leads and cables were accessible to the preschool children posing a risk of injury.

Infection Control:

4. On the day of inspection, after nappy changing, the hands of the babies were observed to be not consistently washed, posing a risk of infection.
5. Gloves and aprons were observed not to be removed after disposing of an unclean nappy, and prior to moving onto the next care activity of placing on a clean nappy, followed with redressing the child. This could lead to a risk of cross infection.
6. Two Children in the sunflower room were observed using soothers, it was noted that the children were sharing soothers. Additionally, when soothers fell on the floor, children were observed placing them back into their mouth without been cleaned or sanitized.

7. Waste bins in both the sunflower and bluebell rooms were broken, children were observed using their hands to open and close the bin lids, posing a risk of cross contaminations.
8. There was an insufficient supply of hot water across all preschool rooms. The water temperature in the bluebell bathroom was measured at 13.1°C which is inadequate for effective handwashing.
9. A child-sized couch in the sunflower room and adult- sized couch in the blossoms room had exposed foam and could not be cleaned effectively.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

- (1) Once this non-compliance was brought to the attention of the management at the inspection the manager ensured the door was fully secured and locked. The manager then proceeded to each care room that evening and the following morning to verbally remind each staff member the strict importance of ensuring that the Sluice room door is secured and locked at all times. During the staff team meeting held the following evening 04/11/2025, the manager reiterated to the staff Team the significance and importance of ensuring that the sluice room door is securely closed and locked at all times. Domestic/kitchen staff have taken on the role of ensuring the sluice room door is shut at all times these staff members are across the hall and are not bound to be in the rooms. All staff members assured management at the staff meeting to take extra care and vigilance to ensure the same. New signage was immediately stuck on the door as a reminder. The manager's daily checklist now includes the sluice room door being securely locked.
- (2) The radiator cover was removed the next morning 04/11/2025. During staff meeting the staff were reminded to include such damages to radiator covers on the daily risk assessments so these can be addressed swiftly addressed and shown the importance of completing the daily risk assessment as these inform any potential risk to the children and to also verbally advise management of same.
- (3) Trailing lights and cables were removed from the sensory room until the electrician was available. Staff were reminded and shown the importance of completing the daily risk assessment as these inform any potential risk to the children and to also verbally advise management of same. Trailing lights and cables were removed from the sensory room until the electrician was available. Trunking was installed by the electrician to ensure the low-lying lights and cables were safe and not trailing.

Infection Control:

- (4) At the staff meeting the nappy changing procedure was reinforced via retraining, infection control was also included in this session of the staff meeting. Manager implemented an induction template for lead educator

to complete with newly appointed educators. Peer mentoring template for nappy changing procedure has also been introduced to reinforce good practices in line with Little Buddies policies and procedures. This is to eradicate forgetfulness or oversight when completing these tasks which fall under these procedures.

- (5) At the staff meeting the nappy changing procedure including removal of ppe after each nappy change was reinforced via retraining, infection control was also included in this session of the staff meeting. Manager implemented an induction template for lead educator to complete with newly appointed educators. Peer mentoring template for nappy changing procedure has also been introduced to reinforce good practices in line with little buddies' policies and procedures.
- (6) The Infection control policy was outlined and retrained to staff during a staff meeting and focus was on the procedures to follow when children share and drop their soothers. It was also looked at times when soothers should not be offered to the children, e.g. when playing. Lead educator Induction Template newly introduced includes Supervision of the children and infection control topics to be observe and monitored by the Lead educator.
- (7) Age-appropriate bins were purchased and supplied in the Sunflower Room and the Blubell room. During the staff meeting staff team were reminded of the importance of ensuring the daily risk assessment to include items such as the bins being broken.
- (8) Plumber and electrician were already sourced to fix this problem with water temperature. Plumber reduced the water thermostat 19th November 2025. Daily risk assessment informs and highlights any irregularities with the water temperature.
- (9) Child sized couch in sunflower room and adult couch in blossom room were both removed. Dress up area was extended into the space of the adult couch, which is demonstrated in the photographic evidence provided. The child sized couch in the sunflower room was replaced with beanbags until finances ensure replacement child sized couches. Manager reminded staff to please use the daily risk assessment to inform of risk management systems and outlined the importance of this to children's safety and wellbeing. Management will closely monitor the completion of these risk assessments during the weekly sign off.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety:

- (1) Minutes of staff meeting and photograph of signage and copy of Manger's daily checklist.
- (2) Photograph provided of radiator cover removed.
- (3) Staff meeting minutes of reminder of daily risk assessments and photographic evidence of trucking installed.

Infection Control:

- (4) Peer mentoring template, practice template and lead educator induction template and Minutes of staff meeting held 04/02/2026.
- (5) Peer mentoring template, practice template and lead educator induction template
- (6) At the staff meeting the nappy changing procedure was reinforced via retraining, infection control was also included in this session of the staff meeting.
- (7) Photographic evidence of new age appropriate bins purchased.
- (8) Daily risk assessment form submitted with daily water checks for preschool rooms.
- (9) Photographic evidence of chairs removed with alternative rest area provided.

Summary Comment

Following receipt of the corrective and preventive actions and the evidence received the requirements for this regulation are met.

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)

Suitably equipped first aid boxes were securely stored, and clearly identifiable, in each care room. The first aid supplies were sufficient to meet the needs of the number of children in attendance.

The equipment was readily accessible for use in the event of a medical incident involving a child.

Non-Compliance Information

(1)
 An Immediate Action Notice was issued on 03/11/2025 as it was observed that there was no person present in the service between 14:00 and 18:00 was trained in First Aid Response (FAR). An adequate response was submitted by the registered provider.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Staff member who possessed the FAR in date training was rostered to be on the premises for the rest of the week. Staff team then completed training that evening of the Inspection 03/11/25 and on the Thursday 06/11/2025. Attendance records to the FAR training were provided to the Inspectorate. Management will ensure scheduling issues will not take precedence over the importance of ensuring staff have completed the training in timely manner.

Supporting documentation submitted

Attendance records for FAR training.

Summary Comment

Following receipt of the corrective and preventive actions and the evidence received the requirements for this Regulation are met.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

The service had a certificate evidencing that the service was insured for 55 children in a full day care service up until the 27th of March 2026.