

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY023
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Name of Service:	First Steps
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Address of Service:	Cloughjordan Childcare Ltd, Old Macra Hall, Main Street, Cloughjordan, Co. Tipperary
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Eircode:	E53 A276
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Name of Registered Provider:	Jim Casey
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	30/10/2024
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No of pre-school children:	AM	19	PM	16
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney and L Jameson
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 community run full day care service was established to provide care and education to children aged between 1 and 6 years old. A registered school aged care service is also provided to children aged between 4 and 12 years old.

The service operates Monday to Friday, 8am to 6pm for 49 weeks of the year. This includes a daily three-hour session which operates Monday to Friday, 9am to 12pm for 38 weeks of the year. The session is funded under the early childhood care and education scheme for eligible children.

The service is operated from detached, two-storey premises in the town of Cloughjordan in north Tipperary. The building was converted and extended for the purpose of operating an early years service. The children have access to one of three activity rooms: one downstairs and two upstairs, sanitary accommodation areas and an enclosed outdoor play area at the back of the premises. The children also have access to the recently installed modular building in the outdoor area that is set up as a sensory room and is available as sheltered outdoor play space that can be used in all weathers. There is a kitchen/staff room and office on the ground floor of the premises.

Staffing

The registered provider, who is the chairman of the board responsible for operating the service, does not work in the service. The person in charge on the day of inspection was the acting manager. There were 5 staff working directly with the children on the day of inspection. There were 11 staff employed in the service including 3 staff employed under the access and inclusion model (AIM). There were less children and staff, than usual, present on the day of inspection which took place during mid-term break.

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(2)(4), 11(1)(2)(4)(8), 15, 16, 19(1)(b) and 23.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation 15 Record of a Pre-School Child.

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

(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.

(7) A registered provider shall ensure that all employees, unpaid workers and contractors are appropriately supervised and provided with appropriate information, and where necessary training, including in relation to the following:

- (a) the policies, procedures and statements of the service specified in Schedule 5;*
- (b) Part VIIA (inserted by section 92 of the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 (No. 40 of 2013)) of the Act, and*
- (c) these Regulations.*

Compliance Information

The staff files of eleven members of staff were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

- (2)(a) Written, validated references from past employers were available in respect of all eleven members of staff.
 - (b) Written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of three members of staff.
 - (c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of the eleven members of staff and relevant documents were held on file. The service had a system in place to ensure that staff were re-vetted on a three-yearly basis, in line with best practice.

(d) Not applicable as none of the staff had lived outside the state for a period of six consecutive months or longer.

(4) Staff held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the national framework of qualification. A letter from the Minister was available in relation to the student who had completed 2 years study towards a degree in early childhood care and education, stating that their studies to date made them eligible to work in an early years service.

(7) The service had a comprehensive induction procedure for new staff and records were maintained of induction tasks when completed, including reading the services policies and procedures. All staff were supported to engage in ongoing professional development, in particular, to stay up to date with health and safety training such as Paediatric first aid and fire safety.

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.

(4) Subject to paragraph (5), where a registered provider contemporaneously provides-

(a) a sessional pre-school service, and

(b) a full day care service or a part-time day care service, or both, the minimum ratio of adults to children applicable for the duration of the sessional pre-school service in respect of the children attending that service shall be the ratio specified in paragraph (3).

(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 19 pre-school children aged between 1 and 6 years old present in the service on the morning of the inspection being supervised by 5 staff across 3 rooms as follows: there were 4 children aged 1 – 2.5 years in the Wobbler room with 2 staff; 9 children aged 3 – 5 years with 2 staff in the Pre-school room and 6 children aged 4 – 6 years with 1 staff in the Montessori room. There were also 2 school aged children aged 5 and 7 years old in the Montessori room, whose presence did not have a negative impact on the adult to child ratios required by the pre-school children. The number of children had reduced to 16 pre-school and 2 school aged children in the afternoon. The person in charge was available to provide relief in the rooms when required.

(2) and (4) The adult to child ratio was maintained within the requirements throughout the inspection.

(8)(a) There were at least two staff present while the service was in operation.

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-

- (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.*

Compliance Information

A sample of 12 registration forms were assessed as part of the inspection process:

- (1) The registration forms contained all of the information required under parts (a) to (i) of this regulation.*
- (3) The registration forms were available on the premises for inspection by an authorised person.*

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.

Compliance Information

(1) The records required under parts (a) to (k) of this regulation were available on the premises.

(3) The records were available for inspection by an authorised person.

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-

(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)(b) The follow practices were observed on the day of inspection which supported the health, welfare and development of the children attending:

The children enjoyed freedom of movement both inside and outside throughout the day. The children were supported to follow their own interests and to explore their environment with the support and encouragement of the staff who were observed to actively supervise the children and to guide them when required.

The children washed their hands before eating and after messy play, outdoor play and nappy changing or using the toilet. Staff supervised the children during hand washing to guide and support them as required. The children appeared to be confident and happy in their environment.

The staff placed the children's meals and snacks on individual plates before serving them to them and sat with the children while they ate, modelling social dining and encouraging conversation. The children were given as much time as they needed to eat their food. New high/low baby chairs had been purchased for the Wobbler room. They were used in the low position which was the right height to allow the younger children to sit at the child height tables for mealtimes and tabletop activities.

The staff used visual aids such as the sand timers to support the children with transitions such as the end of mealtime or freeplay time. The timers were also used to help the children manage turn taking and sharing of toys or equipment.

The children who required a sleep during the day were facilitated to sleep according to their own needs and schedules in a cot or on a camp bed in the sleep room. When there were children sleeping on the camp beds a member of staff stayed in the room.

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:

Entry to the service was through the front door into an entrance lobby. This area is freely accessible to ensure that parents or visitors to the service are sheltered while waiting to gain access to the service. The door between the entrance lobby and the service was secured by an electronic locking system. Staff met visitors at the door before allowing them entry if appropriate.

The outdoor area was enclosed by walls and fences to prevent unauthorised access to or exit from the outdoor play area.

There was a metal stairway leading from the Pre-school room upstairs to the outdoor play area. This stairway was a fire escape route and rarely used for ordinary access to the outdoor play area. Children and staff used the internal stairwell to travel between the upstairs and downstairs of the premises. The stairwell was well lit and had

handrails for staff and children to use when on the stairs. The doors at the top and bottom of the stairwell were secured with an electronic locking system to prevent the children from entering the stairwell unaccompanied by a member of staff.

The ground surface over most of the outdoor area was a soft fall substance that had been poured in place. The equipment for climbing, sliding and swinging was located in the areas with the soft fall surface. The areas around the modular sensory room and the storage sheds were gravel or tarmacadam.

Infection Control:

The service had a range of policies and procedures that supported best practice with regard to managing infection control including: Infection Prevention and Control, Hand Washing and Nappy Changing policies.

Toys, materials and surfaces were well maintained and kept in a clean and hygienic condition. Cleaning schedules were signed off on when tasks were completed.

Administration of Medication:

The service had a policy regarding the administration of medication. Parental consent was sought prior to the administration of any medication to a child attending the service, whether prescription or non-prescription. A written record was maintained, in a medication book, of any medications that were given to a child while attending the service.

There was an individual care plan available for each child with specific medical needs, such as the management of an allergic or anaphylactic reaction.

Safe Sleep:

The service had a safe sleep policy. Children were monitored while they slept, via the vision panel between the Wobbler room and the sleep room and by carrying out physical checks of sleeping children every 10 minutes. These checks were recorded on separate pages for each child, in line with best practice.

There was an electric, wall mounted, dual heating and cooling unit in the sleep room to enable the staff to maintain the sleep room temperature between 16 and 20°C throughout the year. The sleep room was 18°C on the day of inspection.

Fire Safety:

Fire escape routes were kept clear of obstruction.