

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY043
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Name of Service:	Little Learners
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Address of Service:	Tullaskeagh, Knock Road, Roscrea, Co Tipperary
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Eircode:	E53 RX77
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Name of Registered Provider:	Michael Murray
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	06/02/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	50	PM	40
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co Tipperary
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Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney
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Title:	Early Years Inspector
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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	N/A
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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 0 and 6 years old. The service operates Monday – Friday, 7.45am – 6pm for 51 weeks of the year. This includes a daily three-hour session, funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children which operates between 9.30am and 12.30pm, Monday – Friday for 38 weeks of the year.

The service is operated from a purpose built, detached, single-storey premises in a residential housing estate outside the town of Roscrea in north Tipperary. The service is located on a sloping site with the buildings and an enclosed outdoor play area at the higher level and a second outdoor play area at the lower level. The main building has four activity rooms plus an atrium which functions as an additional room for play and rest, a sleep room, kitchen, sanitary accommodation areas and a reception area. A modular building in the outdoor area provides an office and staff room.

This is one of two services in Roscrea operated by North Tipperary Development Company, the other being First Steps (Little Learner) located in the Sacred Heart Primary School.

Staffing

The registered provider does not work in the service. The service manager is the person in charge on a daily basis. There are 13 staff employed to work directly with the children as well as additional staff employed in ancillary duties including administration, catering, cleaning and maintenance.

On the day of inspection there were four staff, employed under a community employment scheme and engaged in studies towards a qualification in early childhood care and education, as well as a childcare student on work experience present in the service in a supernumerary capacity.

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(1)(3), 16(1)(3), 19(1)(a), 23, and 25.

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 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

(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

The staff files of the registered provider and 30 members of staff including a childcare student and community employment scheme staff engaged in childcare studies were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

(2)(a) Written validated references from past employers were available in respect of 27 members of staff.

(b) Written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of 22 members of staff.

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of each member of staff and relevant documents were kept on file. The service had a process in place to ensure that all staff were re-vetted on a three-yearly basis.

(d) Police vetting had been carried out in respect of staff who had lived outside the state for a period exceeding six consecutive months and relevant documents were kept on file.

(4) Staff who were employed to work directly with the children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at levels 5, 6 or 8 on the national framework of qualifications.

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 50 children aged between 8.5 months and 5 years old being cared for by 10 staff across 5 rooms or spaces on the morning of the inspection as follows:

There were 8 children aged between 8.5 and 21 months old in the Baby room with 3 staff.

There were 7 children aged between 22 months and 2.5 years old in the Waddler room with 2 staff.

There were 17 children aged between 2 and 3.5 years old in the Toddler room with 3 staff and

There were 18 children aged between 3 and 5 years old in the Pre-school room and atrium with 2 staff.

The number of children had reduced to 40 by the afternoon, who were cared for by 10 staff.

(2) and (4) The adult to child ratios were maintained within the requirements throughout the day, including when the ratios changed from 1:11 to 1:8 in the Pre-school room after 12.30pm.

The childcare student and four community employment scheme staff were present in the rooms with the children but were not included in the adult to child ratios. The service manager and ancillary staff were present in the service but not included in the adult to child ratios as they were not involved in direct care of the children.

(8)(a) There were at least two staff present in the service while it 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-

- (b) an employee who is authorised in that behalf by the registered provider, and*
- (c) an authorised person.*

Compliance Information

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

(1) A record in writing of the information required under parts (a) to (i) of this regulation was maintained in the service.

(3)(b)(c) The records were available on the premises and could be accessed by authorised members of staff or other authorised persons.

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) A record in writing of the information required under parts (a) to (k) of this regulation were available in the service as follows:

(a) These records were available in the staff files.

(b) – (f) This information was detailed in the statement of purpose and function for the service, available on a shelf in the reception area.

(g) The policies and procedures of the service were emailed to parents on request and were available in a folder in the reception area of the service.

(h) The children's attendance was recorded in registers kept in each room.

(i) Staff rosters were available at reception where staff signed in and out.

(j) The service used specific forms to record the administration of medication to children.

(k) The service had developed and used detailed accident and incident forms to record these events when they occurred in the service.

(3) The records were available on the premises 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-

(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

(1)(a) The following was observed on the day of inspection through direct observation, discussions with staff and review of records:

Basic needs

The children enjoyed freedom of movement both indoors and outdoors. Staff ensured that all children spent time playing and exploring in the outdoors during the day. The weather on the day of inspection was bright and cold following a frosty night. The children from the Toddler room, who went outside in the morning, were delighted to find and investigate the sheets of ice that had formed in places where water lay outside. Waterproof overalls and boots were available to the children so that they could remain warm, dry and comfortable while playing outdoors. The children were supported to become independent with self-care skills suitable to their age and stage of development, such as washing their hands and faces, dressing for outdoors, tidying up after play and setting the table for meals.

The children could rest and relax in the cosy area in their rooms when they wanted to or sleep according to their individual needs and schedules. The children in the Baby room had access to a separate sleep room and cots to sleep in. The children in the Waddler room and half of the children in the Toddler room had a sleep after dinner when floor beds or camps beds were set out in their room or in the atrium, blinds were pulled down and quiet music was played to create an atmosphere conducive to restful sleep.

The children had access to food and drinks throughout the day, in line with the daily menu and timetable.

Children's drink bottles were accessible to them at all times.

Supporting relationships

Children were cared for by the same team of staff each day in favourable adult to child ratios which ensured that each child received as much individual attention as they needed. The staff demonstrated a knowledge of each child's needs and desires in the way they prepared the rooms to support the activities that the children enjoyed and in the way they responded to the children. This was evident especially when they were upset or needed to be comforted.

Staff were observed to be engaged with the children and to support their play and exploration.

Staff communicated with the parents of the children in their room through meeting them at arrival and departure times. Information for parents was displayed on the noticeboards in the entrance lobby.

There was a settling-in process for new children to get used to the service, their room and the staff who would be caring for them before they began their scheduled attendance.

Staff were aware of the importance of transitions and preparing the children to help make these times easier. This was evidenced in the Waddler room at the transition between dinner time and sleep time. The children's beds were set up before dinner. When they had finished eating, they went to a member of staff to have their hands and faces cleaned. They also collected their soother or comfort item they used at sleep time and then went to make themselves comfortable for sleep on their designated bed.

Physical and material environment

Each of the rooms was set up with a wide range of toys and materials suitable to the age and stage of development of the children using the room.

The outdoor areas were well resourced with toys and materials that supported the children's imagination and physical development including climbing equipment, balance equipment, ride-on and push toys, balls, sand, water, wind chimes, construction materials. The outdoor areas had sheltered spaces where the children could sit and play in all weathers.

Staff in the Baby room said that the babies were given the opportunity to engage in the same experiences as the older children, modified to suit their age and stage of development. For example, the service was celebrating mental health week by providing positive sensory activities that promoted wellbeing such as head massages and a foot bath. Staff said the babies loved these experiences.

There were storage areas where seasonal and rotated toys could be stored when not in use.

The service had recently introduced an internal audit of rooms and outdoor spaces to help staff look critically at the spaces and identify areas for development or improvement. Staff made items for their rooms which they could not source otherwise, such as the large felt covered board in the Baby room. This was used as a background for the children to put up and take down pictures which had hook and loop fastener fabric on the back

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 premises was kept secure to prevent unauthorised access or unsupervised exit from the service and to prevent children from gaining unsupervised access to the roadway in front of the premises.

There was a member of staff at the reception desk, at all times on the day of the inspection, to manage the opening and closing of the entrance door. The door between the reception lobby and the main body of the building was secured by an electronic locking system. Entry to the service beyond the entrance lobby was managed by staff.

The outdoor play areas were enclosed by external fencing and gates and divided into separate sections so it could be used by different rooms at the same time. There was a set of concrete steps that gave access from the upper outdoor play area to the lower outdoor play area. These steps were protected by lockable gates at the top and bottom to ensure that the children could only use the steps when supervised by a member of staff.

There was a sturdy set of steps for use with the nappy changing unit for the older children which allowed them to walk up onto the unit, supervised by a member of staff.

All blind cords throughout the premises were secured to the window frames with cord blind safety devices.

Infection control:

The service had an infection prevention and control policy, hand washing policy and cleaning policy to support infection control in the service.

Children and staff were observed washing their hands at appropriate times during the day such as after using the toilet or nappy changing, after messy play and outdoor play and before eating.

Administration of medication:

Signed parental consent for the administration of anti-pyretic medication was sought and recorded on the child's registration form at the time of enrolment in the service.

Staff completed and signed the administration of medication form in respect of all medications administered to children in the service.

Safe sleep:

The service had a safe sleep policy. Sleeping children in the sleep room were observed every ten minutes by staff and these observations were recorded. Staff sat with the children in the Toddler and Playschool rooms while they slept after dinnertime.

Fire safety:

Fire escape routes were kept clear of obstruction on the day of inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

Administration of medication:

Signed parental consent was not sought for medications, other than anti-pyretic medication, prior to their administration.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

We have compiled a new form to capture all the necessary information and consent from the parents before any medication is given. Parents have all been emailed the form and made aware that they need to give themselves an extra five minutes on the morning they are dropping their child if they require medicine. All staff are aware of the new form and are now using it for any medications that have been given.

Supporting documentation submitted

A copy of the medical consent form now being used in the service was sent to the offices of the early years inspectorate on 19 March 2025.

Summary Comment

All evidence submitted meets the requirements of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

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) There were five members of staff present in the service on the day of inspection who held current certifications in first aid response (FAR). Another member of staff held current certification in paediatric first aid.
- (2)(a) There were several suitably equipped first aid boxes distributed throughout the service: one in the entrance lobby, one on the kitchen and one in the atrium.
- (b) The first aid boxes were available if required by a child while attending the service.