

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015TY076		
Name of Service:	The Owl and The Pussycat Day Care and Afterschool Club		
Address of Service:	Cullinagh, Ballina, Co. Tipperary		
Eircode:	V94 K28F		
Name of Registered Provider:	Crona Byrne		
Service type:	Full Day		
Date of Inspection:	17/06/2025		
No of pre-school children:	AM	40	PM 38
Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	North Tipperary Civic Offices, Limerick Road, Nenagh, Co. Tipperary		
Inspection undertaken by:	L McGeeney and A McNamara		
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	N/A		

Description of service

This full day care service was established in 2005 to provide care and education to children aged between 0 and 6 years old. A registered school aged care service is also provided. The service operates Monday to Friday, 8am – 6.15pm for 51 weeks of the year. This includes a daily three-hour sessional service between 9am and 12pm for 38 weeks of the year. Places are funded under the early childhood care and education scheme (ECCE) for eligible children.

The service is operated from the ground floor of a detached, two-storey building in the village of Ballina in north Tipperary. The service consists of six activity rooms, two of which have a partition wall which can be opened to create one large room. The partition was open on the day of inspection, and the large room was used by children attending the ECCE session. Three other rooms were used by the pre-school children: Baby room, Wobbler room and Playschool room. There was one room available for use by school aged children. Other facilities include the sleep room, sanitary accommodation areas, office, kitchen, staff room and outdoor play area.

This is a sister service to Little Owls Naionra, also located in Ballina.

Staffing

The registered provider was not present in the service on the day of inspection but was available to be contacted. The person in charge on a daily basis was the service manager. There were 11 staff with childcare qualifications working directly with the children. There were also three members of ancillary staff engaged in catering, maintenance, cleaning, driving and room support and three secondary school students on work experience present in the service on the day of inspection.

Methodology

Tusla's Early Years Inspectorate is the independent statutory regulator of early years services in Ireland. The Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 define the duty of a registered provider to ensure the safety and well-being of children and to comply with these regulations. This Act also gives Tusla the authority to assess compliance with the regulations. The purpose of regulation in relation to early years services is to ensure that the care, safety, and well-being of children attending such services is upheld. Inspections of early years services are planned based on the following:

- Previous inspection history
- Any information received in relation to the service

The findings on inspection are based on:

- Information obtained through examination of documentation
- Direct observation
- Discussion with relevant staff

This inspection was unannounced and focused on the area of governance/ health, welfare and development of child/ safety/ 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), 19(1)(b), 23, 25, 26, 27, 28 and 29.

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.

Compliance Information

The staff files of four new members of staff and three secondary school students on work experience, and garda vetting records for all other staff were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

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

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

(c) Garda vetting had been carried out in respect of all staff and students aged over 18 years old and relevant documents were kept on file. The service had a system in place for re-vetting staff on a three-yearly basis.

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

(4) Staff employed to work with the children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at level 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) On the day of inspection there were adequate numbers of staff working directly with the children.

(2) The person in charge ensured that the adult to child ratio was maintained throughout the day of inspection.

- In the baby room there were six children being cared for by two staff.
- In the wobbler room there were eight children being cared for by three staff.
- In the toddler room one there were seven children being cared for by two staff.
- In the junior preschool room two there were 10 children being directly cares for by 2 staff.
- In the senior preschool room two there were nine children being directly cares for by two staff.

(4) The adult/child ratio was maintained within the recommended ratios throughout the day, including during staff breaks, nappy changing times and sleep times.

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

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 following practices were observed on the day of inspection which supported the health welfare and development of the children:

Interactions between staff and children were warm and sensitive. Staff spoke in low tones of voice and interacted with children at their level in all rooms. Examples of this were observed in the baby room where staff sat on the floor and engaged with children. A playful atmosphere was observed, with staff engaging actively in games and play with the children. Learning and development were supported through stimulating warm interactions.

Children were comforted if they were observed to be upset or if reassurance was needed. Sharing was promoted with staff suggesting children might swap over equipment or try a similar toy.

Children were supported to sleep according to their individual sleep needs.

The children enjoyed play in both indoor and outdoor environments during the day.

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 door to the premises was locked and needed to be opened from the inside, therefore children could not exit the service unsupervised and unsupervised visitors could not enter. Staff met all visitors at the door before allowing them access to the service and a record was maintained in the visitors book in the entrance lobby.

The outdoor area was secure to prevent children from leaving. There was a soft fall surface under climbing and sliding equipment.

All cleaning agents were stored inaccessible to children.

The blind on the window in the sleep room had a tension rod instead of cords for increased safety.

Infection control:

The service had an infection control policy and hand washing policy. There were hand washing sinks in each of the activity rooms, as well as in the sanitary accommodation areas, which supported the children to wash their hands at appropriate times during the day.

Administration of medication:

The service had a policy regarding the administration of medication. A medication book, with duplicate pages, was used for recording the administration of medications and for attaining signed parental consent.

Medications, both prescribed and non-prescribed were stored in the fridge or in the cupboard of the kitchenette in the baby room, where they were out of reach of the children.

Safe sleep:

There was a designated sleep room in the premises for children to sleep during their attendance in the service. Seven standard cots were provided for children who required naps during their time spent in the service. The service had a safe sleep policy. Children were monitored while they slept, and physical checks were carried out at 10-minute intervals. These checks were recorded on individual sleep records for each child.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection control:

1. The vinyl covers on the two nappy changing mats and the plastic covers on three of the highchairs had split, exposing the foam beneath to dirt and moisture which could not easily be cleaned and therefore posed a potential risk of cross contamination.

It is acknowledged that following the inspection the service manager sent copies of order invoices for two new changing mats, and three new seat covers to the offices of the early years inspectorate, received by post on 23 June 2025.

2. There were cloth towels in both of the children's sanitary accommodation areas. There were also cloth towels used for drying outdoor equipment hung at a low level in the back room where they were accessible to the children when accessing the outdoor play area. Cloth towels pose a risk of cross contamination and must be removed from use for drying hands. Towels used for drying outdoor furniture must be kept out of the reach of the children.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection control:

1. The service purchased new mats, and evidence was submitted the following day. The staff will keep a close eye in case of repeat damage .
- 2 Paper hand towels replaced the towel.

Supporting documentation submitted

Invoices for the new mats were sent to the early years inspector following the inspection.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventative action stated by the person in charge has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 23.

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 staff trained in first aid responder (FAR) available to the children attending the service.

(2)(a) There was a suitably equipped first aid box stored in an easily accessible position in the office.

(b) The first aid box was available to the children attending the service.

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 firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the premises.*

(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) There was a written record of fire drills that had taken place in the service. The last fire drill was recorded as having taken place on 27 May 2025.

(b) There was a written record of the annual servicing of the firefighting equipment which was last carried out on 15 March 2025. The smoke alarms were serviced four times each year, most recently in March 2025.

(4) There was a notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire displayed in a conspicuous position on the premises.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 27 – Supervision

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

Compliance Information

The children were observed to be supervised by the staff throughout the day in each activity room. The children were also supervised when outside their rooms, such as when accessing the sanitary accommodation or nappy changing area, going outside to play and when accessing the sleep room.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

An in-date certificate was in place to demonstrate that the service was insured to provide full day care for the number of children the service is registered to accommodate.

Part VII - Premises and Space Requirements

Regulation 29 - Premises

A registered provider shall ensure that the premises of the service are-

- (a) of sound and stable structure,*
- (b) safe and secure,*
- (c) kept adequately lit, heated and ventilated*
- (d) cleaned, maintained and repaired, as required, and*
- (e) equipped with adequate and suitable sanitary facilities.*

Compliance Information

(a) The service appeared to be of sound and stable structure.

(b) The service was safe and secure. Children did not have access to the kitchen, kitchenette in the baby room or utility area. Children could not exit the premises or outdoor play area without supervision. Access to the service was managed by the staff.

New internal doors, with long viewing panels along one side, had been installed throughout the premises since the last inspection.

(c) Each of the activity rooms, the sleep room and kitchen were naturally lit and ventilated through openable windows in each room. A new blind, with safety rod instead of cords, had been installed in the sleep room since the last inspection. The blind was used to manage the amount of natural light in the sleep room when it was in use. Internal rooms such as the sanitary accommodation areas, office and utility room were lit and ventilated by artificial lighting and mechanical ventilation.

The oil-fired central heating system was not required on the day of inspection, which took place in the summer months. Each room was equipped with a tower style cooling fan, positioned out of reach of the children, which could be used to cool the room in warm weather.

(d) There was a member of staff present on the day of inspection engaged in the review and maintenance of the premises, outdoor area, furniture and equipment.

(e) The children's sanitary accommodation areas were refurbished and upgraded over a year ago, when flooring, toilets, sinks, partitions, fixtures and fittings were all changed. The children's sanitary accommodation areas comprised of three separate areas: an area near the Wobbler room with two toilets and two wash hand basins, an

area at the opposite end of the corridor, near the ECCE rooms, with three toilets and three wash hand basins and a nappy changing area near the baby room with two nappy changing stations and two wash hand basins. This was sufficient accommodation for up to 55 toilet trained children and up to 22 children who required nappy changing. This was sufficient to meet the needs of the children attending on the day of the inspection.

There were separate sanitary facilities available for staff consisting of two toilets and two wash hand basins, which was sufficient for up to 16 staff and met the requirements on the day of inspection.

Non-Compliance Information

(d) The following areas were found to require more attention during the daily cleaning times:

1. The bin in the children's sanitary accommodation area beside the ECCE room had not been emptied the evening before and was full on the morning of the inspection.
2. One of the potties in the children's sanitary accommodation area had not been effectively cleaned after it was last used.
3. The step-up stool in the children's sanitary accommodation area was dirty from use and needed to be cleaned.
4. The sinks in the nappy changing area had black marks on them.
5. The mattress covers on the cot mattresses were soiled and needed to be washed or replaced.

It is acknowledged that following the inspection the service manager sent copies of the updated cleaning schedule for the nappy changing area and children's sanitary accommodation area, photographs of the cleaned step-up stool and proof of purchase for three cot mattress covers. These were received by post to the offices of the early years inspector on 23 June 2025.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

1. The service stated the bin was emptied the night before but as the service opened at 8.00am the kids had filled the bins so now the staff will empty it every 20 minutes or when required.
2. The service have a new cleaning schedule printed up and it will be followed every day.
3. All sinks were washed and scrubbed with stainless steel cleaner.
4. Foot stool was power washed.
5. The service bought all new mattress covers for all cots.

Supporting documentation submitted

Photographs and invoices as detailed above were sent to the early years inspector following the inspection.

Summary Comment

The corrective and preventative action stated by the person in charge has addressed the non-compliance identified under Regulation 29.