

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

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| TUSLA Identifier: | TU2015WD041 |
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| Name of Service: | Little Darlings Childcare Centre |
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| Address of Service: | Carraig An Ard, Six Cross Roads, Waterford City, Co. Waterford |
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| Eircode: | X91 K440 |
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| Name of Registered Provider: | Denise Foley |
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| Service type: | Full Day |
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| Date of Inspection: | 29/08/2024 |
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| No of pre-school children: | AM | 48 | PM | 43 |
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| Address of the Early Years Inspectorate: | Waterford Community Services Cork Road Waterford |
| Inspection undertaken by: | M. Ryan |
| 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).

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| Conditions if applicable | Not applicable |
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Description of service

Little Darlings is a privately run service that first opened in February 2008. The service operates from a single-story purpose-built childcare facility in a residential area on the outskirts of Waterford City. Little Darlings caters for children from 1 to 6 years of age on a fulltime, part time and sessional basis. The service participates in Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme, the National Childcare scheme, and the training and employment childcare programmes. The building accommodates five childcare rooms, a full catering kitchen, sleeping facilities, adult /children's toilets with a nappy changing room. A separate room for chemicals /cleaning agents and an office. The outdoor play area is safely secured at the rear of the building on the grounds of the premises. Opening hours are from 08.00 hrs. to 17.30 hrs.

Staffing

The registered provider is the owner and manager of the service. The service employs 14 childcare workers. Two part time cooks, contract cleaners and one administrative support parson are employed 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.

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment.

Regulation 11 - Staffing levels

Regulation 15 – Record of pre-school child.

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play.

Regulation 22 – Food and drink.

Regulation 25 - First aid.

Regulation 26 - Fire safety measures.

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 registered provider, person in charge, staff and children who were present on the day of the inspection.

Part III – Management and Staff

Regulation 9 – Management and recruitment

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that-

- (a) the service has a designated person in charge and a named person who is able to deputise as required,
- (b) at all times during the period when the pre-school service is being carried on, the designated person in charge or the named person referred to in subparagraph (a) is on the premises, and

(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)
- (a) The registered provider was the designated person in charge. The service also had a named persons who were able to deputise as required.
 - (b) At all times during the inspection the registered provider was on the premises.

The staff files of 18 employees were reviewed as part of the inspection process:

- (2)
- (a) Written, validated references from past employers were available in respect of 12 members of staff.
 - (b) Written, validated references from a source other than a past employer were available in respect of 6 members of staff.

(c) There was evidence of completed Garda vetting disclosure certificates from An Garda Síochána on file for all staff working in the service and all had been re-vetted in the last 3 years.

(d) Six of the staff had lived outside the jurisdiction for more than six consecutive months. Police vetting had been completed from the police authorities in these states.

(4)
Staff who worked directly with the preschool children held recognised qualifications in early childhood care and education at level 5, 6 or 8 on the National Qualifications Framework. There was evidence of continuous professional development and qualification certificates on file.

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 were an adequate number of staff working directly with the children attending the service, which met the requirement for the Childcare Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016.

(2)
On the morning of the inspection there were 48 pre-school children directly supervised by 10 staff members. The registered provider was available.

In the Baby room there were 4 children aged 1 to 18 months were directly cared for by 1 staff member.

In the Toddler room there were 11 children, aged 18 months to 2 years, were directly cared for by 3 staff members.

In the Pre-Montessori room, there were 13 children aged 2.5 to 3.5 years of age, directly cared for by 2 staff members.

In the Montessori room there were 15 children aged 3 to 4 years of age, directly cared for by 3 staff members.
In the ECCE room there were 5 children aged 3.5 to 5 years of age, directly cared for by 1 staff member.

During the afternoon, there were 43 pre-school children directly supervised by 9 staff members.

The numbers were as follows:

In the Baby room there were 4 children aged 1 to 18 months were directly cared for by 1 staff member.

In the Toddler room there were 8 children, aged 18 months to 2 years, were directly cared for by 3 staff members.

In the Pre-Montessori room, there were 11 children aged 2.5 to 3.5 years of age, directly cared for by 2 staff members.

In the Montessori room there were 14 children aged 3 to 4 years of age, directly cared for by 2 staff members.

In the ECCE room there were 6 children aged 3.5 to 5 years of age, directly cared for by 1 staff member.

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-
(c) an authorised person.

Compliance Information

A sample of four completed registration forms were reviewed as part of the inspection process.

(1) The registration forms contained the required information as detailed under sections (a) to (i) of this regulation.

(3)

(c) Completed registration forms were held on the premises and were available for inspection by an authorised person.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 20 – Facilities for rest and play

(1) Subject to this regulation, a registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) having regard to the number of pre-school children attending the service, their respective ages and the amount of time they spend on the premises, there are adequate and suitable facilities for each child to play indoors and, where required by these Regulations, outdoors, during the day, and

(b) there are adequate and suitable facilities for a pre-school child to rest during the day, and in the case of an overnight pre-school service, during the day and the night.

(3) A registered provider of a full day care service, a part-time day care service or a childminding service, other than such a service to which paragraph (2) applies, shall ensure that-

(a) a suitable, safe and secure outdoor space to which the pre-school children attending the service have access on a daily basis is provided on the premises,

Compliance Information

(1)

(a) There were five rooms available in the service for the purpose of childcare provision on the day of the inspection.

The Montessori catered for children 4 to 5 years of age. The ECCE room also offered care for children aged 3- to 4-year-olds. The pre- Montessori room catered for children aged 2.5 to 3.5 years. The toddler room accommodated children from 18 months to 2 years, the baby room had children from 12 to 18 months.

All rooms were carefully planned and zoned to provide easy access to the well-resourced toy environments provided. Each room was set out to accommodate the needs of staff and the age range of children being cared for. The play equipment and furniture were of high quality and the attention to detail in the procurement process was evident by the age appropriateness, suitability and cultural diversity of these. The play resources supported different types of play and offered different levels of complexity to provide challenge and encourage skills development. Three rooms had ceiling to floor south facing windows that had sunlight and natural daylight throughout the day which provided a warm cosy atmosphere to these rooms. The baby room was carpeted throughout allowing a soft snug space for the four babies to be on the floor.

A sizable space was designated in the toddler room to promote gross motor activities with the provision of various sizes and shapes of rubber soft foam platforms. A large variety of age-appropriate handheld play items were available on child accessible shelving, these included timber tractors, ambulances, trucks and diggers. This room had numerous baskets with age-appropriate toys and household items for play. All rooms had wall mounted blackboards and mirrors. All the rooms had child sized sinks, these were observed being used for hand washing and for the children to wash their teeth after eating food.

The Montessori rooms contained areas to support floor play and tabletop activities. Low level adult chairs for staff were available in all the childcare rooms. These rooms had special areas of interest and imaginative and pretend play and were well catered for with the selection of dressing up outfits with relevant accessories. Each room included a home corner, construction stations and had ample supplies of blocks, plastic animals and manipulative play materials.

A prized feature in the ECCE room was a large bare tree that was anchored in a basket. The room leader explained that this was decorated according to the seasons. This feature gave a natural ambiance and the children were observed sitting and relaxing in a rest area under the tree. The rooms had numerous decorative features, wall displays and murals throughout the building. Storerooms held a wide range of additional play materials to ensure variety during the year and support curricular themes.

(b) There was a dedicated sleep area. This area was partitioned from the baby room that had four cots. All toddler rest needs were met during a planned sleeping period when stackable beds were set up in their room. The remaining childcare rooms had soft couches and floor cushions with rugs in designated rest areas draped by coloured hessian canopies.

(3)

(a) The service provided a large child-centered play-based outdoor environment that was available and suitable for all the pre-school children attending the service to be outdoors together at any given time. This outdoor setting had been successfully created with the use of natural materials such as timber, tree bark, and logs that created a wholesome attractive and healthy environment.

The area was fully secured with high concrete walls separating the large outdoor space from the neighbouring residential area. The outdoor area had been sub divided into six separate play pods separated by picket fences and gates to enable staff and children to access the different areas. This allowed all children to be outdoors at any given time. The play areas were surfaced with grass sponge matting and tarmacadam.

There was a range of interests for the children in the outdoor play areas such as large activity frames and plenty of trikes, bicycles, cars, slides and climbing equipment. Child-size garden picnic tables and seating were positioned throughout all outdoor play areas. Children were observed sitting and chatting at these tables.

A popular feature in the outdoor area was the indoor/outdoor sensory room that provided a wide variety of messy play opportunities and boxes of supplies of sensorial equipment. Since the last inspection there were four new covered timber structures for children to use as playhouses, one of these was an enclosure for an extensive sand pit observed to be very popular with the children. An additional grassed garden was newly developed off the ECCE room. This area had a feature tree with built in seating surrounding the tree trunk. The garden was separated from the road with picket fencing. The staff member explained that this garden was proving invaluable for picnics and outdoor story time with small groups away from the larger play space.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 22 – Food and drink

A registered provider shall ensure that adequate and suitable, nutritious and varied food and drink is available for each pre-school child attending the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

All food and meals were prepared and cooked from an onsite kitchen on the premises that had been inspected by the Health Service Executive (HSE) Environmental Health Services on 23 November 2023. The service employed two part-time cooks. There was a four weekly menu plan devised for the spring and summer of 2024. All special dietary and cultural food requirements were catered for as far as possible. The service had a healthy eating policy, which was also available to parents.

Breakfast was available for all children between 08:00hrs and 09:00hrs offering a selection of cereals and toast with milk or water drinks. The first snack was offered at 10:00hrs on the day, this comprised of fresh/dried fruit platters with toast with milk or water drinks. The second snack at 15:00hrs in the afternoon was ham sandwiches.

The main meal on the 29 August 2024 was chicken goujons/ broccoli /and mashed potatoes. There were no children on baby milk formula on the day of the inspection, the policy for the service was for parents to supply prepared baby milk formula for storage in a fridge in line with safe food practice. Drinking water was available for the children to freely access throughout the day in all the rooms. The toddlers were observed transferring to the dining room adjacent to the kitchen for their main meal.

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)

Five staff employed to work in the service were currently First Aid Responder trained. And the remainder of the staff had paediatric first aid training completed. The registered provider assured that there were at least three staff with First Aid Responder training at all times

(2)

(a) There were first aid boxes in all the childcare rooms. and in the kitchen

(b) These first aid boxes were suitably equipped, well stocked and available at all times.

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 the monthly fire drills that took place in the service, most recently on 31 July 2024.

(b) There was a written record of the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms in the service. Firefighting equipment was serviced annually, most recently on 22 July 2024 and the smoke alarm system was service on 20 February 2024.

(4)
Notices of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire were displayed in the main entrance lobby and in each childcare room throughout the premises.