

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WD047
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Name of Service:	Little Stars Preschool
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Address of Service:	Kingfisher Club, Tramore Road, Waterford City, Co. Waterford
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Eircode:	X91 X2XY
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Name of Registered Provider:	Susan Kennedy
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Service type:	Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	23/01/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	29	PM	n/a
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Primary Care Centre, Castle Park, Arklow, Co. Wicklow Y14 AE10
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Inspection undertaken by:	L O' Connor
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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	Not applicable
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Description of service

Little Stars pre-school is located on the outskirts of Waterford City. The service caters for children aged 2 years 10 months up to 5 years attending the ECCE programme. The service is registered to provide a morning ECCE programme from 9am to 12pm and an afternoon ECCE programme from 1.30pm to 4.40pm. It is registered to accommodate 60 pre-school children at any one time.

The service operates from a purpose-built premises which is located on the grounds of the Kingfisher Club. The children have access to two care rooms: the small room and the large room. There is an outdoor area to the side of the premises which can be accessed through the large room. The children's sanitary area and nappy changing area is adjoining the large care room. The children have access to a sports hall which is located within the Kingfisher Club.

Staffing

The service employs four staff, including the registered provider. On the day of inspection, there were four staff members working directly with the pre-school children. There were also three students on work placement within 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 and safety. The inspection may also focus on other areas as required.

The inspection focused on an examination of compliance under Regulation 8: Vetting disclosure, Regulation 9: Staffing levels, Regulation 19. Health, welfare and development of child, Regulation 16: Record in relation to pre-school service and Regulation 25: First aid. However, on inspection additional non-compliances which posed a risk were identified under Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child. These findings are outlined within the relevant regulation within this report.

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under Regulation 16 Record in relation to pre-school service.

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 to the registered provider on 24 January 2025 as it was deemed that there was an increased risk to the safety of the children due to loose blind cords within the two care rooms. A response was received from the registered provider on 24 and 27 January 2025 detailing the actions taken. Please refer to Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of child for further information.

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.

(3) The procedures specified in paragraph (2) shall be carried out prior to any person being appointed, assigned or allowed access to or contact with a child attending the pre-school service.

(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 of the service and a named staff member was appointed to deputise when required.
- (b) The registered provider was present and in charge of the service when the inspector arrived unannounced at the service and was present for the duration of the inspection.

(2) The files for seven adults were reviewed and the following was available;

- (a) (b) Written validated references were available for the seven adults from a previous employer and from a source other than a previous employer.

(c) The required Garda Vetting disclosures were in place for the seven adults. The service adhered to the re-vetting timeframes as outlined in the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice, requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d) Through review of documentation and discussion with the adults, it was determined that police vetting was not required.

(3) It was demonstrated that the vetting and recruitment procedures were carried out by the registered provider prior to the appointment of any adult within the service.

(4) Documentary evidence was available to demonstrate that the four adults working directly with the children held at least a major award in Early childhood Care and Education at Level 5 on the National Qualifications Framework.

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.

(3) Subject to paragraph (5), a registered provider of a sessional pre-school service shall ensure that at all times the minimum ratio of adults to children specified in column (3) of Part 2 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) therefore at that reference number is satisfied.

Compliance Information

(1) On the day of inspection there was an adequate number of staff members working directly with the children attending the service.

(3) The adult to child ratio was maintained throughout the inspection. On arrival to the service, there was four adults working directly with the 29 pre-school children.

- There was 2 staff members working with 7 children aged 2.5 to 3 years in the small room.
- There was 2 staff members working directly with 22 children aged 3 to 5 years in the large room.

Three students were also present within the large room to provide additional support when required. The registered provider confirmed that these adults were not included within overall the adult to child ratio.

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:

- (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)
- (j) Administration of medication records were not available for review. The registered provider explained that the service does not routinely administer medication to children attending the service. The service’s policy was reflective of the practices discussed.
 - (k) A sample of the accident and incident records were reviewed. It was demonstrated that the records were completed with the required details and shared with the child’s parent and/or guardian.

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

The interactions observed by the inspector between the staff and children were calm, responsive and playful throughout the inspection. For example, at 9.45am the children in both care rooms were immersed in free play. The inspector observed that the staff members and students were actively engaged with the children through verbally acknowledging the children’s individual interests, sitting with the children and providing questions to extend the children’s learning. The following was observed:

- In the small room, a child aged 2 years was playing with pretend food at the kitchen area. The child was overheard by the inspector to ask the staff member ‘what is it?’ while holding up a pretend food item. The staff member playfully responded in this conversation saying, ‘it is toast,

do you eat toast for your breakfast?’ This playful conversation continued between the staff member and the child with the child asking about other items of the pretend food.

These practices were reflective of the service’s behaviour management policy which outlined that staff provide the children with a calm environment as this supports children in building positive relationships with staff and other children.

Children were provided with choice and freedom with their own play ideas. Staff members from both of the care rooms outlined the varying interests of the children’s and how it is supported. The staff members outlined that play was child-led and that each child chooses what they want to play with. This child-led practice was observed by the inspector on varying occasions as follow;

- In the large room between 9.30am to 10.30am, the 22 pre-school children were engaged with varying types of play and activities including an arts and craft activity, scissor- cutting activity, sand and water play, playing in the home corner and playing with cars. The children were observed to independently move around the room and access additional play equipment from boxes and low-level shelving units. During this time, the staff members were observed to remain within close distance observing the children and provide guidance when required.
- At 10.45am, while in the sports hall, the staff carried out planned games including an obstacle course and a bear hunt. The staff members explained that while in the sports hall, there is a balance of free play and games for the children and that children have choice if they would like to take part in the planned games. It was outlined that some children enjoy the planned games, while other children enjoyed playing their own games. This practice was observed, whereby, some children continued their own games while the planned game took place. Providing children with choice in their play supports the development of children’s self-confidence and independence.
- The staff members were aware of individual children’s needs and were observed to be responsive and pro-active in meeting the children’s needs. Staff members discussed measures which are in place within the service to support children to reach their full potential. The staff members were observed to implement these practices which included when children required additional support, recognition, or comfort. The following was observed:

- While in the sports hall, a child was overheard saying to a staff member from a distance ‘I want a hug’, the staff member responded with their arms open while the child ran towards the staff member who said ‘Of course, come here’ and comforted the child.
- In the large room, two children placed their art and craft activity on a shelving unit to dry. The children looked to the staff member standing close by who exclaimed ‘Wow – look at these’. The children smiled at the staff member and both of the children began to explain to the staff member what was in their picture.

These practices positively supported children’s sense of belonging and confidence.

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) A person trained in First Aid Response (FAR) was, at all times, immediately available to the children attending the pre-school service. This was evidenced through the staff roster and the in-date FAR certification provided for inspection.

(2) A suitably equipped first aid box was available to the children at all times and it was stored within an easily accessible position within the service.

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.

Non-Compliance Information

General Safety:

1. An Immediate Action Notice was issued to the registered provider on 24 January 2025 due to a potential immediate safety risk posed to the children.

The registered provider did not ensure reasonable measures were in place regarding the safety of the blind cords in the service. There were two unsecured blind cords in the large room and one unsecured blind cord in the small room. These were in reach of the pre-school children and posed a risk of strangulation. The registered provider was made aware of the risk during the inspection and remedial action was taken.

2. The registered provider did not practice their own healthy eating policy which stated that whole grapes were not permitted within the service. At snack time in the large room, there were two children aged 3-5 years with whole grapes in their lunchboxes. This practice posed an increased risk of a child choking. The registered provider was made aware of this by the inspector and carried out remedial action.

Fire Safety:

3. The attendance records within the small room were not reflective of the children present within the service. The attendance record had eight children's names recorded and the following was noted at 11.40am.
 - a. Three children aged 2 to 3 years who were present within the service were not recorded on the attendance record.
 - b. One child was marked in and was absent on the day.

This practice was at variance of the service's fire safety policy which stated the attendance record must be up to date as it was used for fire drills. This posed an increased risk in the event of an emergency evacuation as a child may be unaccounted for.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

General Safety:

1. The registered provider provided a response to the Immediate Action Notice (IAN) on 24 January 2025. The response outlined that action to secure the blind cords was taken and that the registered provider would contact a competent person to carry out works to secure the blind cords. Further actions were submitted by the registered provider on 27 January 2025 outlining that the works had taken place to secure the three blind cords.

In response to the CAPA, the registered provider stated that the cords were reinstated at a height whereby they are inaccessible to children and were fitted by a professional installer. The cords were secured through a loop affixed to wall. Training was delivered to staff relating to safety of roller blind cords and requirements to report any broken or unsecured cords.

2. Immediate remedial action was taken to remove and cut the grapes as is required by policy of the preschool. Verification checks were performed on all other lunchboxes within the service. The service issued a reminder to all parents and guardians regarding the service's healthy eating policy. Staff were retrained in relation to the service's healthy eating policy and daily checks will be performed on the children's lunchboxes.

Fire Safety:

3. The service's attendance record was updated to reflect actual attendance within the room. There is now a room specific register, this will capture the children attending the service on the specific day as attendees vary. Staff were retrained in relation to maintaining accurate records as related to the fire safety policy. There will be verification checks carried out by preschool manager of preschool attendance records.

Supporting documentation submitted

General Safety: Photographs to demonstrate the works carried out and that the blind cords were secured and out of reach of children. Documentation to demonstrate staff training on general safety measures including reporting of broken blind cords and the service's healthy eating policy.

Fire Safety:

Photograph of a completed attendance record for one care room within the service. Documentation to demonstrate staff training on fire safety.

Summary Comment

The requirements of Regulation 23 Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child have been met by the actions and assurances submitted by the registered provider.