

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WH016
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Name of Service:	Mellowes Childcare
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Address of Service:	Moygrehan, Athboy, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	C15 W288
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Name of Registered Provider:	Deborah McGuinness
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Service type:	Full Day, Part Time, Sessional
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Date of Inspection:	30/03/2026
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No of pre-school children:	AM	67	PM	67
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Address of the Early Years Inspectorate:	Early Years Inspectorate, Tusla, Child and Family Agency, SAP Office, St. Loman's Campus, Springfield, Mullingar, Co Westmeath.
Inspection undertaken by:	C. O'Connor Hughes & K. Murphy
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 full day care service is registered to accommodate children aged 1 to 6 years and operates from 08:00 to 18:00 on a Monday to Friday basis.

The Early Years' Service is located in a two-storey purpose-built premises. Six pre-school rooms accommodate the children in the service. The wobbler room, toddler room 1, toddler room 2, ECCE red room, cinema, staff room and office are located on the ground floor. Three ECCE rooms namely the yellow room, green room, blue room and the kitchen are located on the first floor of the service.

A large outdoor play area is attached to the rear of the premises. An adventure centre is co-located adjacent to the outdoor play area. On-site parking and set down areas are located to the side of the premises.

The service is located on the outskirts of the town of Athboy, County Westmeath.

Staffing

The registered provider employs twenty adults including the person in charge, eighteen childcare practitioners and a cook. Fifteen adults including two rostered relief staff members who came to work in the service at 11:00 and 14:00 until 17:30 were working directly with children on the 30 March 2026. The registered provider and person in charge attended the closing meeting.

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

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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 - (1)(a)(b)(c) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (4)

Regulation 11 -Staffing levels - (1) (2) (8)(a)

Regulation 19- Health, welfare and development of child - (1)(b)

Regulation 20 Facilities for rest and play (1)(a) (3)(a)

Regulation 21- Equipment and Materials

Regulation 23- Safeguarding health, safety and welfare of child

Regulation 25- First aid - (1) (2)(a)(b)

Regulation 26 -Fire safety measures - (1)(a)(b) (4)

Regulation 28 – Insurance

Regulation 32- Complaints

A sampling process was used to assess compliance under regulation

Regulation 19 (1)(b) Health, Welfare and Development of child

Regulation 20 Facilities for Rest and Play

Regulation 23 Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of child

As a result, the scope of the inspection included the wobbler room, toddler room 1 and the ECCE blue room.

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.

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

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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*
- (c) there is a clear management structure in the service that identifies the lines of authority and accountability in the service and the specific roles and responsibilities of each employee and unpaid worker.*

(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 person in charge was available in the service.

(b)

The registered provider and deputy designated person in charge were present for the duration of the inspection.

(c)

Clear management structures were in place and displayed in the corridor of the service.

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Following a review of previous inspection findings, information available on inspection and discussion with the registered provider it was determined that four new staff members had commenced in the service since the last inspection on the 23 June 2025. These four files were reviewed and the following was noted.

(2)(a)(b)

Two written validated references were available from past employers in respect of the new staff members.

(c)

A garda vetting disclosure was available in respect of the four new staff members. An in date garda vetting disclosure was available for eleven adults who required renewal since the last inspection on the 23 June 2025.

The service demonstrated compliance with the Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Notice requiring services to renew Garda vetting every three years.

(d)

Police vetting was available in respect of two new staff member who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)

Three of the new staff members working directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at levels 5, 6 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

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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.

(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)
The minimum ratio of adults to children was maintained during the inspection.
- (2)
There were sixty-seven children attending the service supervised directly by fourteen adults in the morning and in the afternoon.
- (8)(a)
The staff roster reviewed indicated that two adults are on the premises during the hours of operation.

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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)

Wobbler room, Toddler room 1 and ECCE Blue Room

There was a calm and happy atmosphere in the service. Children were engaged in and enjoyed play activities in the indoor and outdoor environments that included free play, story time, creative play and physical play supported by staff members. Children in the Wobbler room enjoyed freedom of movement as they explored their environment and enjoyed playing with toys on the comfortable mats provided. Children were independent and made their own choices of what activities they wish to participate in and what friend they wanted to play with in the Blue room. Change of play experiences were available for children attending Toddler room 1 as they availed of the soft ball playroom and the cinema.

Regular nappy changes were carried out for children attending the wobbler and toddler rooms. Older children were observed to use the toilet independently and wash their hands. The younger children slept in a restful atmosphere in the sleep rooms physically checked by staff members every 10 minutes. In Toddler room 1, children slept on low level beds supervised by staff members in the room. Snacks and meals were planned at regular intervals for children attending on a full day care basis. Younger children wore bibs to protect their clothes during mealtimes. Children enjoyed the dinner presented by the cook that consisted of meatballs, potato, vegetables and pasta sauce with water to drink.

The staff were positive towards children and were familiar with each child, their personalities and their daily routines. Children were happy and content with their carers in the pre-school rooms. Staff used children's individual names, maintained eye contact and conversed with the children during play activities and at mealtimes.

The service works in partnership with parents and guardians. Parents were observed to collect their children from the pre-school service after the ECCE session concluded. A verbal handover was provided to parents at this time. The registered provider stated information updates and events are shared with parents electronically. One to one

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phone calls are arranged as required. The children's learning journal depicting their play and work activities are shared with the parents on a regular basis.

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)

Suitable play equipment was provided indoors which included toys and equipment for construction, tabletop activities, dress up, arts and crafts and home corners.

(b)

There are two sleep rooms located adjacent to the wobbler and toddler rooms in the service located on the ground floor. The sleep rooms provided ten cots for younger children to sleep and rest. Correct safety mattresses were available in the cots. Low level beds were available for rest or sleep. Suitable rest areas were noted in the pre-school rooms.

(3)(a)

The outdoor area was accessed directly from the service. The perimeter was secured by a wooden fence, wire fence, trees, foliage and key coded metal gates. The surfaces noted consisted of a combination of wood chip, natural grass and fine gravel stone. The outdoor play areas were separated into areas for older and younger children. A variety of toys and play equipment for use by the children was available. Interest areas included a sand

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room, a soft playroom, a dance/ disco room, climbing units with slides, climbing walls, swing sets and wooden structures including a shop, a ship and post office.

A new wood chip rolled play bark has been put in place in some play areas since the last inspection on the 23 June 2025. The toddler play area was not accessible and fenced off due to the time required for the bark to settle with the inclement weather.

Part V - Care of Child in Pre-school Service

Regulation 21 – Equipment and materials

A registered provider shall ensure that there is adequate and suitable furniture, play and work equipment and materials available on the premises of the pre-school service.

Compliance Information

Equipment was well maintained, durable and easy to clean. The tables and chairs were child sized suitable to each child's age and development. Age and stage appropriate toys, equipment and materials were accessible to children on low level open shelving and drawer units. Personal belongings and bags were stored individually for each child. There was a variety of suitable and sufficient play materials and equipment to support children for various forms of creative, manipulative, imaginary and free play in the indoor and outdoor play environments in the service. An inclusive display representing the various nationalities attending the service was displayed in the main reception of the service.

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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:

Access to the service is through the main door which is locked and secure and a coded lock system and doorbell are used for entry which ensured no unauthorised access to the service.

The inspectors signed the visitors book on arrival.

Risk assessment checklists for the pre-school rooms were available.

The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment, toys and equipment and the safe storage of cleaning agents.

Infection Control:

The premises were visually clean. All toys and materials were easily cleanable. Cleaning schedules were available.

Nappy changing logs were maintained for younger children attending the service.

Children's individual nappies and creams were stored correctly in the sanitary accommodation.

Soothers were stored correctly in individual containers.

Natural ventilation was available through openable windows in the pre-school rooms and in the sanitary accommodation.

Foot operated pedal bins were available in the sanitary accommodation and in the pre-school rooms for the hygienic disposal of waste.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available if a child presented with a high temperature. Medication was stored safely inaccessible to children.

Safe Sleep:

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A sleep log noting the colour, breathing and position of sleeping children indicating children were checked every 10 minutes while sleeping was available for review. The environmental temperature recorded was 19.5 degrees Celsius in the wobbler sleep room.

Fire Safety:

The fire emergency exits were free from obstruction in the premises. A fire assembly point was noted in the outdoor play area of the premises.

Outing:

The registered provider stated outings are not undertaken by the service.

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)
Three adults were qualified in First Aid response (FAR) and available on the premises during the hours of operation.

(2)(a)
A first aid box was located in the office and at various locations throughout the service.

(b)
A first aid box was accessible to adults caring for children in the service.

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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)

A written record for the completed monthly fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was recorded as taking place on the 23 March 2026.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The firefighting equipment in the premises was serviced in September 2025. The smoke alarms in the premises were serviced in November 2025.

(4)

A notice of the procedures to be followed in the event of a fire was displayed in a conspicuous position in the service.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 28 - Insurance

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

Compliance Information

There was evidence of current insurance cover for the number of children attending the service. The expiry date noted was the 27 March 2027.

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Part VIII - Notifications and Complaints

Regulation 32 – Complaints

- (1) A registered provider shall ensure that the complaints policy of the service specifies-
- (a) the procedure to be followed by a person for the purposes of making a complaint in relation to the service,
 - (b) the manner in which such a complaint shall be dealt with, and
 - (c) the procedures for keeping a person who makes such a complaint informed of the manner in which it is being dealt with.
- (2) A registered provider shall ensure that-
- (a) a record in writing is kept of a complaint made to the provider in respect of the pre-school service, and
 - (b) the complaint is duly dealt with in accordance with the provider's complaints policy.

Compliance Information

- (1)
- The service's complaints policy was available and reviewed. The relevant details in respect of (a)(b)(c) were noted in the policy.
- (2)(a)(b)
- Records indicate that the service held information in respect of (a) and (b).