

Early Years Inspectorate Regulatory Report

Pre School

TUSLA Identifier:	TU2015WH050
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Name of Service:	Chatterboxes Childcare Ltd
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Address of Service:	Dept of Education Campus, Cornamaddy, Athlone, Co. Westmeath
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Eircode:	N37 E183
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Name of Registered Provider:	Bill McMickan
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Service type:	Full Day
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Date of Inspection:	30/07/2025
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No of pre-school children:	AM	31	PM	32
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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 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).

Conditions if applicable	Not applicable.
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Description of service

This service is registered as providing a full day care service. The age range of children that can attend the service is 0 to 6 years of age. The service operates between the hours of 08:00 – 18:00 on a Monday to Friday basis. The Early Years' Service is located in a single storey purpose-built premises. Four pre-school rooms namely the baby room, the toddler room, the junior pre-school room, the senior pre-school room, a sleep room, a kitchen and an office/ staff room are provided. An outdoor play area is attached to the rear of the service. On-site parking and set down facilities are available. The service is located on the outskirts of the town of Athlone, County Westmeath.

Staffing

There are thirteen adults employed in the service. The deputy person in charge and eight adults were working directly with children on the 30 July 2025. A cook was present in the service. The registered provider met the inspectors at the entrance to the service and stated he was travelling to his second early years' service in Celbridge, Co Dublin. The registered provider does not work directly with children.

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 (1)(a)(b) (2)(a)(b)(c)(d) (4)
- Regulation 11– Staffing Levels (1)(2) (8)(a)
- Regulation 15 – Record of a Pre-school child
- Regulation 19 - Health, Welfare and Development of Child (1)(b)
- Regulation 23 - Safeguarding Health, Safety and Welfare of Child
- Regulation 24 – Checking in and Out and Record of Attendance
- Regulation 25 - First Aid
- Regulation 26 – Fire Safety Measures
- Regulation 28 – Insurance
- Regulation 33- Furnishing information to the Agency.

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 deputy 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

(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 deputy person in charge was available in the service.

(b)

The deputy person in charge was present for the duration of the inspection.

Fourteen staff files including the file of the registered provider were reviewed and the following was noted:

(2)(a)(b)

The required number of written validated references were available from past employers and from a source other than a past employer with the exception of the non-compliance outlined below.

(c)

A Garda Vetting disclosure was available in respect of the fourteen files reviewed. 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 four adults who had lived outside the state for a period of longer than six consecutive months.

(4)
Eleven staff members working directly with children attending the service held a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at levels 5 to 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications or a letter of eligibility to practice.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)(a)(b)

1. A second written reference was not available in respect of one staff member.
2. The written references in respect of two staff members were not validated by the registered provider prior to the commencement of employment in the service.

This non-compliance was noted on the last inspection on the 7 December 2023.

The corrective and preventive action stated from the last inspection on the 7 December 2023 did not prevent reoccurrence of the non-compliance.

(4)
1. One staff member present and working directly with children does not hold a major award in level 5 in Early Childhood Care and Education on the National Framework of Qualifications.

This non-compliance was noted on the last inspection on the 7 December 2023.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

(2)(a)(b)

1. The second reference has been received and put on staff member's file.
2. The written references have been validated by the manager.

This was an oversight on behalf of management. Every effort will be made in future to make sure all the paperwork is in order as soon as possible, so that it is not forgotten.

(4)

The staff members qualifications have been sent to the Department of Children for review. Management are awaiting the outcome and the evidence will be submitted when received.

This staff member has done the same course as two other staff members in the service. Unfortunately, her certificate was damaged in a fire. In future, we will try to engage the Dept of Children at an early stage to try to obtain the relevant paperwork.

Supporting documentation submitted

References submitted.

Summary Comment

(2)(a)(b)

The non-compliance has been addressed.

(4)

This non-compliance remains outstanding until the evidence is submitted in respect of the staff member's level 5 childcare qualification.

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 thirty-one children attending the service supervised directly by nine adults in the morning.
There were thirty-two children present in the afternoon supervised by eight adults.

(8)(a)

The staff roster reviewed indicated that two adults are on the premises during the hours of operation.

Non-Compliance Information

(2)

1. It was observed that the number of adults present in the service were not managed appropriately to maintain the adult: child ratio during nappy changing for children attending the baby room.
On 30 July 2025 there were eight children in the baby room; one child aged 0-1, six children aged 1-2 and one child age 0-3. Based on the number of children, their ages and attendance pattern on 30 July 2025, two adults were always required at all times to maintain the adult: child ratio in the baby room.
Adults did not seek relief cover when carrying out nappy changing procedures during the inspection leaving a ratio of one adult to seven children while the second adult carried out nappy changing at 11:15 and again at 14:30.

Corrective & Preventive Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective and Preventive Action

Management have amended the roster to take account of nappy changes. Staff have also been asked to help out where necessary, as the service had enough staff on the day to help with nappy changes.

Nappy changes have been added to the roster, to prevent this from re-occurring.

Supporting documentation submitted

Staff roster.

Summary Comment

The actions submitted are appropriate to address the non-compliances. The implementation of these actions will be reviewed on the next inspection.

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.*

Compliance Information

(1)
Further to a corrective and preventive action since the last inspection on the 7 December 2023, a sample review of ten child records indicated information relating to (a)(b)(c)(d)(e)(f)(g)(h)(i) was available in respect of children attending the service.

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)

Children enjoyed play time in the indoor and outdoor environments engaged in various play activities including story time, tabletop activities, physical play and free play supervised by staff.

Meals and snacks for children were prepared fresh on site by the cook. A daily menu plan was displayed in the entrance hall. Dietary needs were observed to be catered for. In the baby room the children in highchairs and the children seated at tables were arranged together in a semi-circle to facilitate interactions between the children and the staff who assisted and supported them during mealtimes. The children in the baby room wore bibs to protect their clothing during mealtimes. Children were encouraged to feed themselves and staff assisted the children as required. Older children in the pre-school rooms sat and enjoyed their meal engaging in conversations with their peers.

Regular nappy changes were carried out on a routine and needs basis. Staff were observed to communicate and interact positively with the child during nappy changing. Older children were encouraged to be independent as they washed their hands before meals and snacks.

Younger children slept in a restful and peaceful atmosphere in the cots in the sleep room and on floor mattresses in the toddler room. Older children were observed to relax in the cosy rest areas in the pre-school rooms.

The staff were positive towards children and used children's individual names, maintained eye contact and conversed with the children during play activities and mealtimes. Children requiring extra support and supervision were assisted by staff in a positive and caring manner. Children in the Junior pre-school room enjoyed conversations with staff about going to the swimming pool and what they need to bring in their swimming bag. Children in the pre-school room enjoyed telling stories about dinosaurs and pirates while they sat in the cosy rest area. The designated person in charge stated a verbal handover is given to parents on collection. The child's learning journal depicting their play and work activities and child developmental observations are shared with parents at the end of the pre-school term.

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 entrance to the service was secure to ensure the safety of the children within. Access is gained through a bell system connected to the service telephone system. The inspectors signed the visitors book on arrival. The service met the necessary safety requirements in respect of the indoor environment and toys and equipment.

Infection Control:

Toys and equipment were easily cleanable. Cleaning schedules were available for review. Children were observed to wash their hands before snacks and after using the toilet. Foot operated pedal bins were noted in the pre-school rooms and sanitary accommodation. Soothers were stored correctly in individual containers in the baby room. Refrigerators were available in each room for the storage of perishable goods. A record of the fridge temperature was maintained.

Administration of Medication:

Temperature reducing medication was available in the service if a child presented with a high temperature and was stored safely in the service. Health care plans were in place for children with a defined medical condition.

Safe Sleep:

In the baby sleep room and the toddler room staff were observed to remain with children until they settled to sleep and carry out a visual check every ten minutes on sleeping children. A sleep log recorded the colour, position and breathing of sleeping children. A digital thermometer was noted in the baby sleep room and the environmental temperature was recorded at 20 degrees Celsius. A record of the room temperature was maintained in the sleep log. An air conditioning unit was in place in the baby sleep room.

Fire Safety:

Fire exit routes were unobstructed in the service and fire assembly points were in place to the front and rear of the building.

Outing:

The outing policy and risk assessment for the annual outing was available and reviewed.

Non-Compliance Information

Infection Control:

1. In the nappy changing area attached to the baby room the mechanical ventilation was not operational to provide appropriate ventilation to the area. This posed a potential infection control risk.

Action submitted by the Registered Provider

Corrective & Preventive Action

Infection Control:

1. The electrician has been contacted to fix the fan. Evidence will be sent in as soon as the job has been completed. In the meantime, manual ventilation (window to be opened during the day to help with circulation).

Staff have been reminded to tell management when equipment is faulty.

Summary Comment

This non compliance remains outstanding until the evidence is submitted in respect of works carried out to fix the mechanical ventilation. The corrective action will be assessed on the next TUSLA inspection.

Part VI - Safety

Regulation 24 - Checking in and out and record of attendance

(1) A registered provider shall ensure that each pre-school child attending the service is checked in and out of the service by an employee or an unpaid worker.

(3) A registered provider shall ensure that-

(a) no person other than-

(i) pre-school child attending the service,

(ii) a person dropping or collecting such a child,

(iii) an employee, or

(iv) an unpaid worker, can enter the premises without his or her entry being approved by an employee, and

(b) a daily record in writing is kept of the entry on the premises of any such person.

Compliance Information

(1)
The records of arrival and departure reviewed verified that each child attending the service was checked in and out of the service by a nominated staff member.

(3)(a)

All entry to the service with the exception of (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) has to be approved by a staff member.

(b)

A visitor log was in place to record the details and purpose of all visitors to 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)

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

(2)(a)

Two equipped first aid boxes were readily available in the service.

(b)

A first aid box was accessible to the adults caring for the children in the pre-school 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 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 monthly record for the completed fire drills was available on the premises. The last fire drill was carried out on the 2 July 2025.

(b)

A record was available demonstrating the number, type and maintenance of the firefighting equipment and smoke alarms on the premises. The smoke alarms and firefighting equipment were serviced in November 2024 and January 2025 respectively.

(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 27 March 2026.

Part IX - Inspection and Enforcement

Regulation 33 – Furnishing of information to agency

A registered provider shall furnish the Agency with such information as the Agency may reasonably require for the purpose of enforcing and executing these Regulations and the information shall be in such form, if any, as may be specified by the Agency.

Compliance Information

The deputy person in charge provided the required information for the inspection.